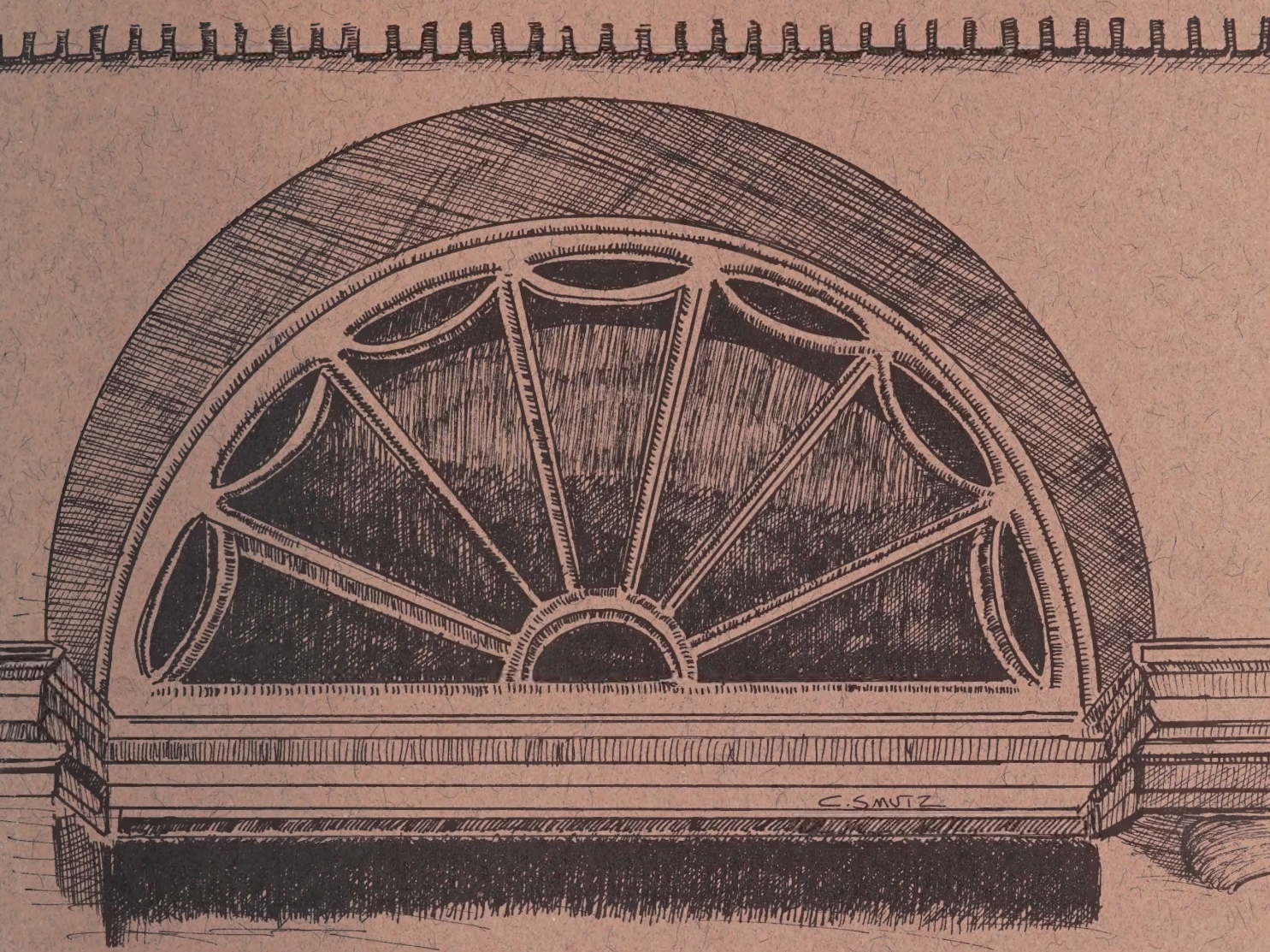

VICTORIA PRESS

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
1996

This issue is dedicated
to
Thomas E. Gaffigan, Dean Emeritus, Arts and Sciences Division.

Cover drawing by Constance M. Smutz. A window at Fernihurst (Magnolia Building).

Inside cover by Heather Gordon.

Victoria Press

Second Issue

A publication of
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Editorial Board

Celia M. Miles
Rebecca Caldwell
Richard Croom
Nancy Dillingham
Alma Fisher
Mary Hay Gwynn
David Holcombe
Lisa Johnson
Roy McGinnis
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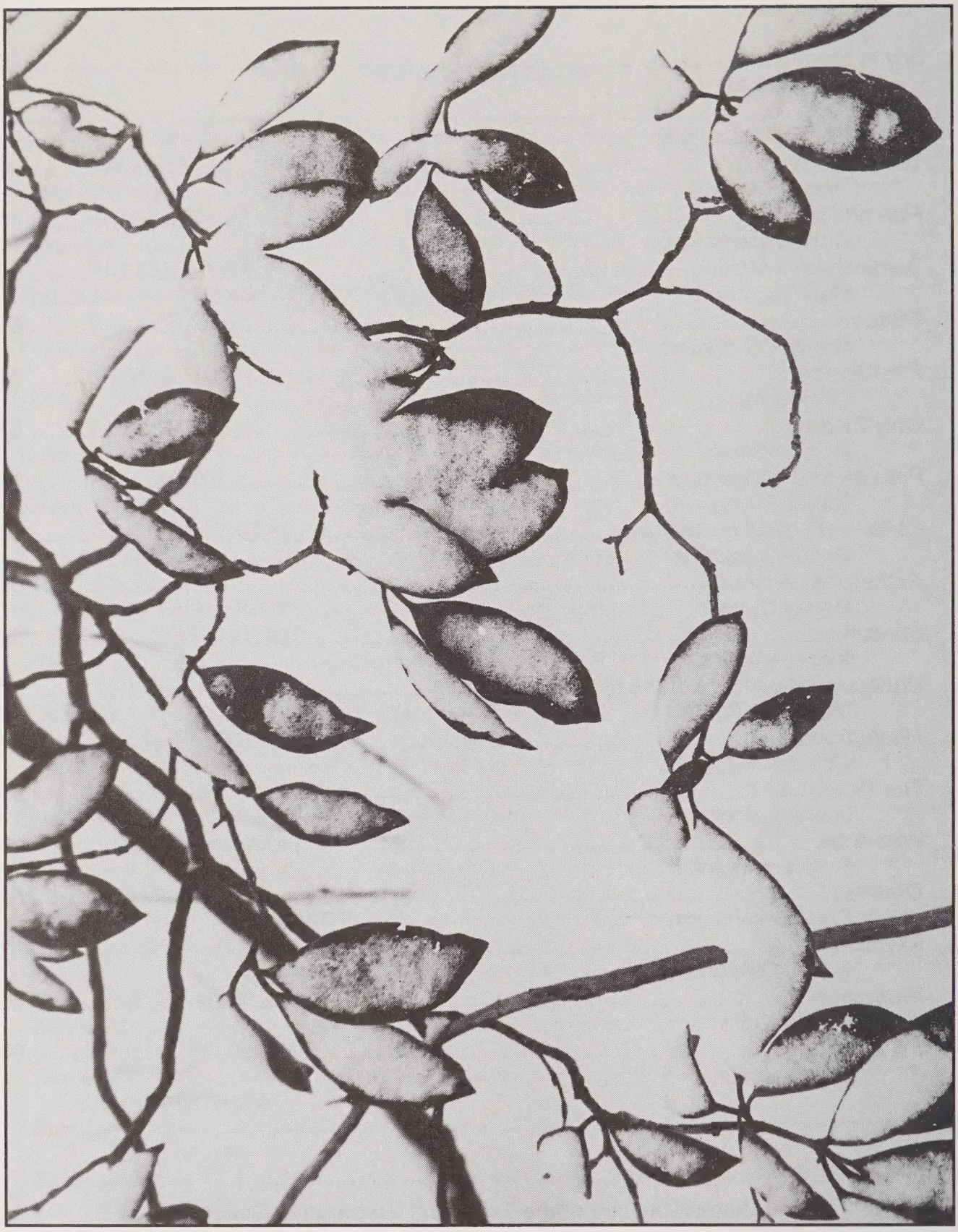
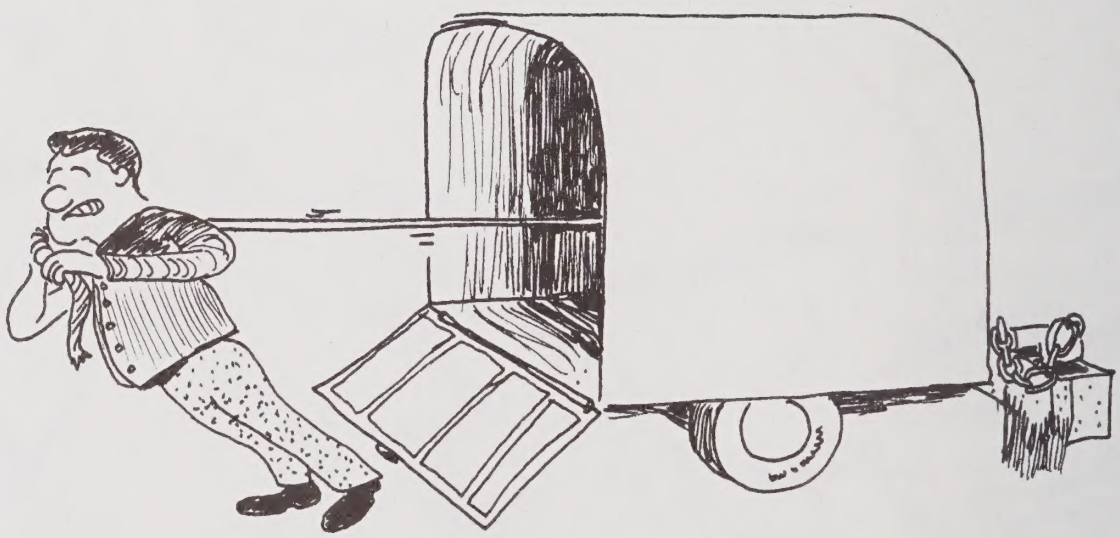


Photo by Celia Miles

Deep Memory

Robert Morgan

On the hottest days when ragweeds
wilt and roads weep black and air braids
itself in knots as haze levels
mountains, when the slowest cowbells
stop or even drift backwards, you
can sometimes tear a hunk of new
turf off the bank above the spring
and press your fingers in something
that remembers the last ice age.



Drawings by Richard Croom

The Gentle (and Unappreciated) Art of Cow Wrestling

Roy McGinnis

I am a rusticator. This is a label I've come to terms with. At first I tried to pretend to old timers that I was an old hand but people know. It's something in the way you stand or move or the way you call a duck a chicken by mistake--and they never let you forget. When I am ninety-seven years old there will be living somewhere near me a ninety-eight-year-old codger who will remember and gleefully remind everyone, "He ain't from around here. He's from way out west in Georgia! He's a gol' durn rusticator!" But I can live with that. Perhaps my grandson will be accepted as a local.

Being new to farming means always finding yourself in an adventure. Those fortunate few who still grow up on farms take for granted the joy of country living and lose the sense of adventure. And, having learned about animals and crops from diaperhood, they miss the fun of discovering new latent talents--like cow wrestling.

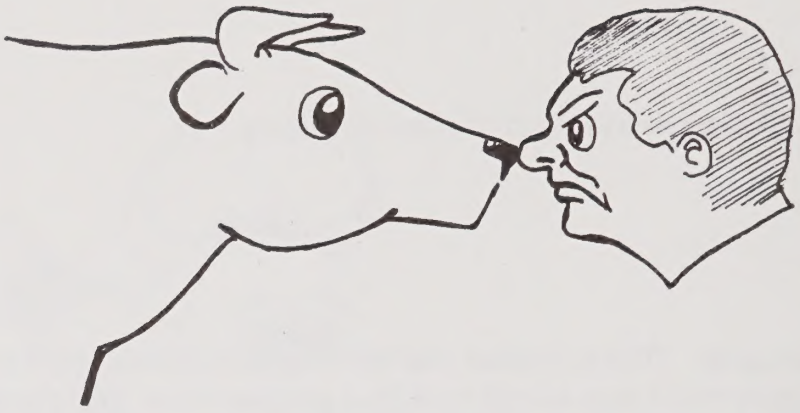
I had been hesitant to get a cow (You never buy a cow; you "get" or "come-by" one. Please take notes. There will be a test later.) because I had seen them, seen how they treated the ones they knew and loved. I had seen their wild eyes when startled by something scary like a new strand of barbed wire fence. More importantly, I had seen the ones who owned the cows. Neither looked safe. But a few months ago I found myself with a tired, old, lame horse who was eating me out of barn and stall. A friend offered to take her off my hands and, while he admitted he might be taking a beating (hah!), he would help me out by trading me a fine Holstein heifer. (This is one example of how one "comes by" a cow.) She was only eighteen months old. I figured she would be manageable, never having developed any motherly instincts. She even came delivered.

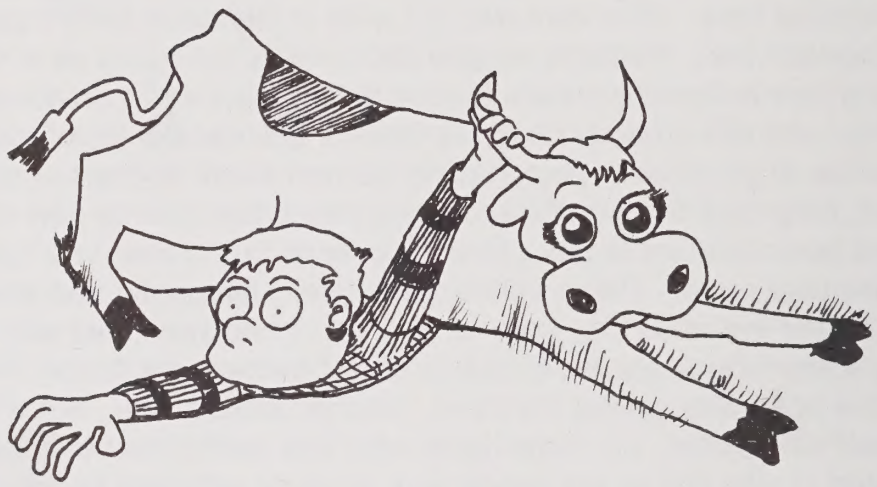
The adventure began when my friend opened the back of the trailer. He handed me the lead rope (There's a good one for you--a lead rope.) and said, "Here's the keys. She might need to be gentled up a bit before you can handle her." But she wouldn't start, just stood there looking at me with those doleful eyes. It took three of us and my dog and a sharp stick to unload the cow. I had had the forethought to put a horse halter on the cow so, I reasoned, she would be tractable. Lesson one: Horse halters are made for horses--cow halters are made for bovine types. Do not confuse the two. Strike one for the rusticator.

When she left the back of the trailer she must have been looking for the rapture. She jumped, kicked and generally thrashed her horned (yes, to top it off she came armed to the teeth) head. But not to fear--rusticator is here. It was simply a matter of physics. Step one: Halter the beast. Step two: If she resists, pull down and force the ornery heifer into the mud. Step three: Run, brother, run, because cows do not like being pulled down into the mud no matter what cowboys may say.

She headed for the mountain, as irate cows are apt to do.

I headed to the mountain as well because I had my hand wrapped securely around the other end of the rope, as green cowhands are apt to do.





Drawings by Richard Croom

Lesson two: Cows intent on climbing a mountain get somewhat annoyed at having to drag people along with them. They are solitary creatures and prefer to enjoy the climb alone without someone screaming at them words like "ornery #@*" and other cartoon phrases. So I released her and headed back to the house, wondering just how well I would be able to see a dark cow at night on the side of a mountain.

My son came running with a bucket of sweet feed, a rope and a flashlight. We tracked the cow into the thickest brush on the mountain, wandering around unfamiliar woods and skirting cliffs as we went. Finally we found her. She looked at me with her red eyes dancing in the flashlight beams as if to say in her cowy kind of way, "Good luck--Bubba!"

The rope was long enough so that after only an hour or so I was able to take hold of it again, being careful not to pull this time. She had decided to rest at the edge of a cliff, near a large red oak through which ran an ancient strand of barbed wire. I wanted her to rest at the bottom of the cliff with something sharp running through her, but exhaustion often makes me think irrationally. I managed to wrap the rope around the wire, so she had no place to go. She was safe. Tied. Stopped. Lassoed. Down for the count. Out of commission. But I felt she needed to learn a lesson, and I was just the fella that could teach it to her. So, summoning my best Barney Fife swagger, I looked her in the eye. "Little girl," I said, "I'm gonna teach you who's the boss around this place." She looked doubtful.

I was tired. She was tired. I figured she was more tired than I. I was a fool. Lesson three: Cows do not get tired. Their near-wild cousins migrate some ungodly distance across the plains of Africa -- what is it -- something like thirty or forty times a week? What was I thinking? I was thinking I would throw her down. I grabbed her horns and twisted. It had to work. I had seen it work in rodeos. I had seen it work a thousand times on westerns. Hallelujah, it *did* work. It was all just a matter of physics--leverage--higher intellect. Final lesson: Never bulldog a heavy-horned ruminant who is standing uphill from you. It hurts. Bad.

After she got off me, I limped back home. The next day I brought a bucket of feed up to the hungry heifer and led her back home as easily as a kitten. Did I mention that cows are fickle? From that day until her untimely death a few months later, she lived the life of a bovine queen--meals delivered, all the hay she could eat, tied safely to the largest tree on the place where she lived out her days in peace.

Today she sings with the choir invisible. As a symbol of my undying love for her, I have had her remains frozen where they rest safely in my freezer. From time to time I take a piece of the old girl out, and we have dinner together.

Even a city boy knows how to enjoy a good steak dinner.

Photos by Celia Miles

Cold of a Night

Ren Decatur

He was fingering
The straps of an old pair
Of tattered overalls
As he stared vacantly
Out over the hills
Stacked up behind
Themselves until they
Were out of sight

"Gits cold here
Of a night,"
I heard him say,
In a quiet measured tone,
As much to the stacked hills
As to me.

A prolonged probing
Silence shuffled along
Behind that statement.
Meanwhile my eyes searched
Furtively for some
Suggestion of purpose
About its origin.

"Mountain's got its own ways,"
I recalled hearing from some
Remote past; so, I waited
For whatever might follow,
Knowing that he never
Let anything incomplete
Fall out of his mouth.

"That there's my brother,"
He said, again in a deep
Low voice, like soft slow
Thunder rolling across
One of those distant
Stacks of mountains.

He was pointing to a grave
Marker as weathered as the shallow
Furrows in his fallow fields,
Fields overgrown with a broomstraw
Commune which had permanently
Settled squatters' rights.

The map of his face
Showed of old pain,
Newly turned,
Unlike his fields
Whose pain had taken root
Deep beneath the stone-littered
Surfaces, seemingly never
To be upturned again.

"He was kilt,
Shot twiced,
Whilst he was a-makin'
His way home from fishin',"
He told me, as if
I weren't there at all.

"We all knowed who done it,"
He went on,
Squatting,
Talking to the ground
Holding his brother.

"They hain't paid nothin' for it,
Neither," he said, as he
Crushed clods of dirt
Between thick, stained fingers,
"Not yet, no way."

"Hit'll come back around
Though," he said sideways,
Without looking up from
The squat.
"Always does up here."

"Sowin' 'n' reapin'
Is nature's kin in
The mountains; hain't
No gittin' 'round it,"
He prophesied
Matter-of-factly,
Studying the crushed clods.

"Mountain's got its own ways,"
He muttered almost inaudibly,
Jolting my feeble memory
Into a remote past.

As he rose,
His joints cracked like
The cold brittle of winter
Laurel.
Slowly he reached
A deliberate hand
Down to pluck a vagrant
Piece of pithy straw
From the sunken mound
Of his brother's grave:

"Yep, gits cold here,
Of a night."

Photo by Shirley McLaughlin

Coffee in January

Pat Riviere

I want to drink café latte,
Deep, dark, oily beans
Ground fine as dust
Brewed strong, hot
Blended with frothy sweet cream

Holding the cup in both hands
Careful not to disturb the balance
I feel the warmth penetrate my fingers
Slowly I drink,
Sipping deep and long
Each taste a treat,
An explosion of contrasts:
Sweet, strong, bitter, mellow.
Savoring each mouth full
Warmed from the inside out
As if it were mid-July
And you and I sat arms around each other
Tucked between two mountains
On a car seat going nowhere
Fighting our way through anger and reconciliation,
Honor, desire, and finally truth:
Drinking deep that awful knowledge
We could stay this way forever
And never get enough

Of Teachers I Have Known

Deborah L. Harmon

The third grade boys laughed wildly at something which could be hilarious only to third grade boys. They elbowed and pushed each other about, mussing their once carefully combed hair. The third grade girls paired up and diligently practiced their lines while they smoothed their costumes, hair, and nerves. They all had a glow about them, although the boys' glow came from their incessant roughhousing. "Line up," commanded Mrs. Rolston. The tone in her voice brought all other activities to an immediate halt, and the children scurried obediently to their designated places.

"Shh . . . shh," Mrs. Rolston cautioned with a finger to her lips, as they approached the door of the multi-purpose room at Linden El. Linden El was the affection-laden name for the elementary school they all attended in that small town. They were about to perform for the semiannual PTA meeting. The parents who had carefully delivered them sat in the gray folding chairs listening to news about the planned oral polio vaccination program being presented by the school nurse in her crisp white uniform. They were attentive; this news seemed to have a sense of urgency and they leaned forward collectively to better understand the implication for their children. The turnout was excellent, and the room mothers in the adjacent hall fretted over whether enough refreshments were on hand as they laid the long folding table covered with the traditional white paper cloth.

As the children waited quietly, a wistful thought crossed the mind of the smallest girl in line. "Oh, I wish my mom could be here to see the play tonight." The thought was quickly suppressed; of course, her mom was sick . . . always, and there were four siblings at home all younger than she. "It is almost time to go in," said Mrs. Rolston. "You've worked hard and you're ready. I'm very proud of each of you." She went down the line looking--one by one-- into the scrubbed faces, really looking, and dropping praise on each head as she touched them lovingly.

The large overhead facility lights captured in their metal nets shone harshly as the children hurried behind the makeshift curtain. The name of the play has long been forgotten but the images remain. The scene opened with a community of witches animatedly discussing Halloween. This was, of course, a time when there was no inkling that this childhood ritual was bad for your teeth and health, and perhaps even was a pagan event.

The parent witches were discussing their offsprings' increasing developmental achievements. By all accounts, most of the little witches were making remarkable progress in spell-making, cauldron-tending, and broom-flying. But there was one littlest witch who absolutely couldn't do anything right at all. On cue, the littlest witch made another mad dash across the imaginary stage floor and fell in a heap . . . again. And tears, real tears, dripped down her cheeks. "I'll never be ready for Halloween," she cried. The little witches taunted her and the adults merely shook their heads, frustrated with her ineptness and confounded by her emotion.

The humiliation continued as the littlest witch's spell-making was done in a light, lilting tone--definitely not the screeching quality that had been finely honed by the others. When she dropped rose petals into the bubbling cauldron, even the lead witch felt faint. Oddly, the transition moment has been forgotten, perhaps overshadowed in memory by what was to come. In an accident of some sort, the littlest witch's shiny black cape was caught and torn away revealing the most delicate fairy wings fashioned from a coat hanger covered in ballet tulle. She was a vision in her fairy costume and borrowed pink ballet slippers. The other witches all flew away; goodness knows what they must have thought! The tiny fairy was left alone in the dark woods. However, since this was a children's play, she was rescued by a beautiful fairy princess who arrived with the magic of Glenda a la The Wizard of Oz. And the princess was overjoyed to find her long lost daughter.

Gently pushed from behind the curtain, all the actors joined the fairies and took a bow. The "misunderstood littlest witch" also known as "precious fairy daughter" stepped forward for a bow of her very own. It was a shining moment that lingers sweetly in the grown child's mind.

As this tale was spun, my son listened as I read him the story I had been tapping out at the computer. After saying that the boys should have had a bigger part in the story, he tilted his head and asked, "Is there a moral to this story?"

I suppose there is . . . recognizing, appreciating, and casting students as stars can create a magic that can reveal them in all their splendor.

Photo by Constance Smutz

Excellence in Teaching

Sheila Tillman
North Carolina Community College Teacher of the Year 1995

Excellent teaching demands teamwork--correlating the working efforts of faculty and staff, acting with one accord--to produce results greater than the sum of the parts. Academic teamwork means colleagues must be willing to share ideas, to give and accept constructive criticism, and to subordinate personal needs to the needs of students. There is no doubt that such teamwork is evidenced on the A-B Tech campus, and I am proud to be a part of one working team--the Hospitality Education Department.

Success in teaching also requires the proper environment--a place, a surrounding, an established attitude--conducive to experimentation with new teaching techniques. A place where it is acceptable to run the risk of failure in pursuit of learning breakthroughs. It is fortunate that the College embraces academic freedom, providing educators with the opportunity to exercise the innovative and varied teaching methods required to keep learner interest high and to convey to the student the relevance of the curriculum to workplace and personal needs. For me, academic freedom means that I can approach teaching from an exaggerated platform. My teaching success probably stems from my attempts to create a climate with learning as its core, via the use of simulations, demonstrations, skits, cartoons, posters, songs, videotaping, and lots of humor, all in pursuit of a "saturation of the senses"--a total learning immersion. Not a quick fix, the fun approach rather energizes students, encouraging involvement in the learning process. My goal is simple: I want my students to KNOW the information when they leave class, and I will do what it takes.

Teaching and learning are at the very core of our College. When all else is stripped away, student learning is the very reason for its existence.

Effective student learning demands effective teaching. Effective teaching requires spirited teachers--those that touch the soul. During our lifetime, all of us have had teachers with varied teaching styles, but few have had an impact. Why?

In reality, like many skills, the practice of teaching is a proficiency that can be learned, but it is the spirit of delivery and application, coming from within, which separates teachers that have impact from those who quickly fade from memory.

Spirited teachers are those individuals who are "naturals" for the job. They are often referred to by students as caring, concerned, sensitive, open-minded, and enthusiastic. They display consistency of behavior and purpose. They walk, talk, and breathe their commitment to motivating and influencing students to develop personally and academically. They are recognized for maintaining high standards and encouraging student involvement in the learning process. They empower students.

Spirited teachers are motivated by intangibles. Their rewards for doing a good job--a smile, the "Ah ha, I've got it!" or the "Thanks for helping"--are rather simple, but support their passion for teaching.

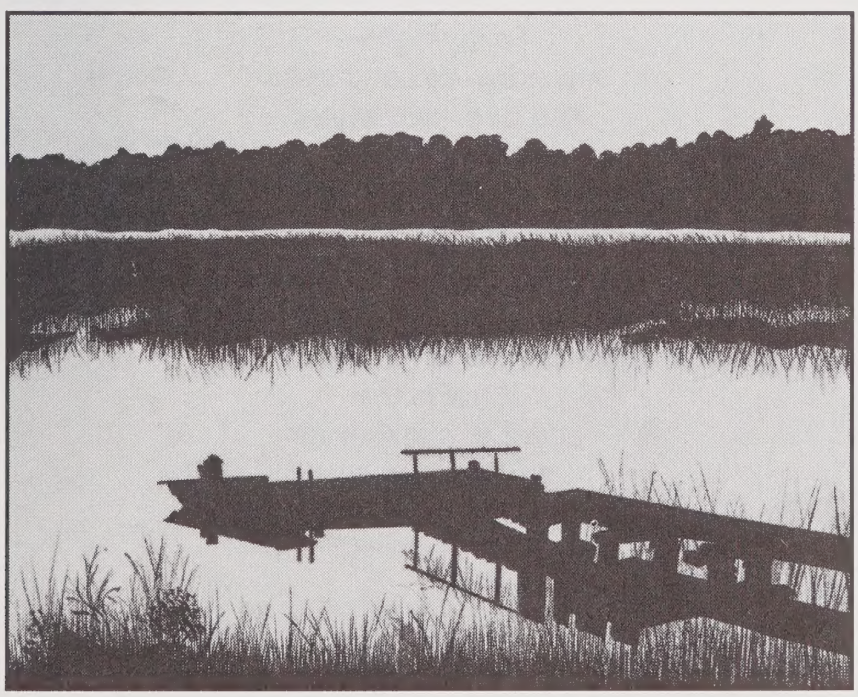
Good teaching requires knowledge, persistence, innovation, and time. Excellent teaching--teaching with spirit--requires teamwork, the proper environment, college support, and most importantly, caring. I believe that a combination of skill, knowledge, and awareness along with a unique sense of empathy for each student--personally, academically, and professionally--provides the vehicle to raise teaching to a higher level.

A-B Tech is indeed fortunate to have a cadre of highly educated and spirited teachers, a core academic team that remains in pursuit of the proper combination of these qualities that inspire their students, honor the college, and contribute to the community as a whole--to produce results greater than the sum of the parts.

The Doves

Roy McGinnis

The doves are sleek and young
gathering for the reaping time
on the singing, wind-whistling wires.
Already their harvest of young is over.
I saw them nesting not two months ago
and now the season of young is over
They join forces to fly into death
through the guns of autumn
Doves are the harbingers, not robins
Behind them was a rainbow.
And I read two promises in the sky.
The dove and the rainbow, now where have I read that before?
A promise of life and death.
Their lives, I think, mean more to me than to them
who have no memories.
I can remember and predict,
worry and fret,
plan and practice to be more.
They can only fly
and know God.



Ink/brush by Shirley McLaughlin

Grandpa's Porch

Will Hooper

Caught in the peeling paint
and the scent of summer air
are evenings of swinging
in the dying day's shadow,
and Grandpa's foot kicking
a blue wooden slat floor
propelling our ceiling-bound craft
and his leg rising above
and just not kicking Grandma--
her sitting rocker-bound and knitting
beneath his feet.

To my left--
amber scraps of sunlight stroll languidly
down the hills of Appalachia
and fall into the cow pasture across the road,
where they momentarily lean against
scattered and slow chewing cows
and spray long thin cow shadows
across the tall grass.

To my right--
a window of darkness.
The bedroom where
twelve children,
thirty-two grandchildren,
thirty-one great-grandchildren,
and sixty-five years were conceived.
That large square in the wall
is just dark when I look inside.
It holds the
scent of summer air
and the mystery
of my soul's descendence.

To the Knight in Shining Armor

Janice Howell

Once upon a time
I longed to be shorter,
To be thinner, to be blonde.
I wished to be for you,
Not me.

But...

Mother's seed formed me,
Living filled me up,
Knowledge chipped away the rough edges.
Although not yet complete,
I stand alone.

And...

Time has polished
The lenses of my eyes.
I see you perched askew your white horse,
Your armor tarnished,
The unprotected places vulnerable.

Hence...

The spell is broken.

Flesh

Roy McGinnis

I once knew a man named O'Gealth
who bought fitness with all of his wealth.
Since the strength of his heart
was way off of the chart
he eventually died in good health.

Woodcut by Shirley McLaughlin

Dinosaur

Nancy Dillingham

I first saw him on the Saturday after my fourteenth birthday, but I had heard a lot about him that summer. He had set up an open-air market called Pearl's Poetry Parlor (which I thought was an interesting play on words) where he also cut hair and read poetry over a loud speaker. People said that he used to teach in some college but that now he was as crazy as a loon. (That next school year, whenever the bully of the school wanted to ridicule someone, he called him "Pearlie.")

The proprietor of Pearl's Poetry Parlor was Jeffrey Pearl--his patrons called him "Professor." Prof. Pearl sold everything. My aunt, who was also to be my teacher in the fall when school began, read religiously the newsletter that he put out each week. Besides advertisements for all the merchandise he carried, he also offered services such as poetry critiques.

Since my aunt fancied herself a poet, she clipped the ad, and, early one Saturday morning, we set out for Prof. Pearl's. She had taken me under her wing for the summer since I was to be her pupil in the fall and since my mother was working overtime in the factory in town. She had given me the literature textbook to read, which I went through in one night. I didn't tell her so. I made a great show of reluctance, but I loved all the stories and the poems. She insisted also that I begin to keep a journal, which I did, balking outwardly at the idea. After all, I did have a reputation to maintain--that of a wisecracking tomboy, smart-alecky and self-sufficient. I took great delight in second-guessing my aunt, so I kept one for her and one for me.

My aunt was an old maid--everyone said so, but not to her face. Nonetheless, she was really sensitive about the matter and lectured all of us about it. But she really fit the title, and it was hard not to think of her in those terms. She was also very close with the penny--people said she was so tight she screaked--and wanted to be sure that she got her money's worth. I guess she felt that she could get a crash course in the art of poetry for $1.95 if she took her poems to the professor.

That Saturday morning she stopped by to get me on her way to the market. After lecturing me on the evils I would find there--drunken men and loose women--she told me to look out for some good tomatoes and squash, instructing me completely and lengthily in the art of buying good produce. I sat in the back seat nodding my head, trying to appear only appropriately interested when she looked in the mirror at me. I was really excited and impatient to get there.

After the rather long drive--my aunt was a very careful driver--we passed the homemade sign indicating that Pearl's Poetry Parlor was just ahead. I heard the music and voice before my aunt stopped the car in the parking lot. It was really just an open field with the market in the middle.

We got out, and I inched away as soon as I saw my aunt examining pink, plastic flamingos and began to make my way through the crowd to the front of the market where the professor was cutting hair and reciting to the accompaniment of a record player into a mouth-level microphone rigged up to the back of the barber's chair.

At first glance, the professor looked like a boxer. His head was massive, and he was overweight, but muscular. His hair was greasy, and his dingy white shirt was wet with sweat. I elbowed closer until I was on the front row to his left, my tennis shoe propped against an ornately carved bedstead. I tried to look casual, but his voice excited me. It was mellifluous yet full-bodied, hard yet soft around the edges. When he finished a line, he looked over at me and caught my eye. I lifted one eyebrow in a challenging "Oh, yeah?" and jammed my hands further into my pockets. But I was impressed! His long-lashed, rich brown eyes, despite the red lines, were expressive. The space in which he was working was very small and cluttered, and, when he finished, I felt his breath on my bare arm. He looked at me again, and I shrugged. He smiled and showed strong, even teeth, stained, perhaps, from tobacco. I made my way back into the crowd a little and continued to observe him without him noticing me. He was said to be twenty-eight or thirty, which was old to me, but he looked older, lines already deep in his dark forehead where his greasy, curly hair tumbled now as he bent to concentrate on cutting hair once again. His arms, weather-tanned to where he rolled his sleeves, were big and hairy; his hands, large but beautifully shaped. He reminded me a little, at that moment, of an unkempt Clark Gable.

I made my way to the produce and was assiduously examining tomatoes and squash when my aunt appeared again. "Let's sit down," she said, "until the crowd thins. Then I want you to take my poems to the professor."

As noon approached, the crowd thinned to sparse, and my aunt carefully counted out $1.95 from her small, worn change purse. She handed me a sheaf of poems in a neatly labeled folder along with the money, admonishing me not to lose either.

Again, I made my way to the front. The professor was sweeping hair into a little pile in the corner of the dirt floor. He propped his broom up and sat down in the battered barber's chair. I swaggered forward and thrust the folder and money to him in one gesture. He took them in his big hand.

"These yours?" he asked in his deep voice.

"No, they're my aunt's over there," I said, jerking my thumb over my shoulder, indicating my aunt in one of the rickety chairs at the edge of the arena.

"Come back next Saturday, and I'll have them ready for you," he said.

I nodded and started to walk away.

"Liked my poetry, eh?" he added.

I stopped and spun around defensively, but he was smiling. I walked on.

When I got back to my aunt, she had three or four tomatoes and two or three squash picked out. "Now, Honeybunch, go and get these and we'll leave," she said.

I gritted my teeth and smiled. Now I had to walk all the way back up there and watch him look through me again.

When I got back up to him in his chair, he was drinking a bottle of orange soda. He got up and set his drink down next to the dusty cash register beside the barber tools on the small, makeshift desk. "How about a cold drink?" he said as he rang up the produce, put the change in the drawer, and handed me the tomatoes and squash in a crushed-up bag he fished from a disheveled mound inside the desk.

"No, thanks," I answered coolly.

"Okay, suit yourself," he said and smiled again.

How come I could fool everybody but him I wondered as I made my way to the car where my aunt was waiting.

When we returned the next Saturday, I noticed four children playing with a huge, taffy-colored dog in the field where we parked. Rumor was that the professor had two children of his own and that two more had just wandered in and stayed. As I got out of the car (my aunt having mysteriously decided to pick up her poems herself from the professor), I looked at the children more carefully. They were all very dirty, for it had rained the night before, and they were playing in the mud puddles created in the field by the tire tracks. Their clothes were nondescript and mostly brown now from the mud. I picked out the two that must be his. They were chubby and stout with dark, unruly curls--one boy and one girl. The other two, also one boy and one girl, were skinny as sticks with thin, stringy blond hair.

"What's his name?" I asked as I sidled up to them, indicating the dog.

"Taffy," they answered in unison, looking up from their mud pies.

"Where's your mama?" I asked.

The two curly-headed ones looked at each other for a few minutes, sharing a secret, then continued to play. The other two skinny ones just looked blank as they patted daisies into their cakes. I sat on a rock and petted Taffy.

After a while, one of the stout ones looked up. "My daddy reads palms," he said.

I nodded, looking impressed, leaning forward conspiratorially.

"He read Taffy's paw," the other one giggled.

I laughed and said goodbye as they were getting ready to eat their pies and wandered into the arena and looked around. Sure enough, there was a hand-lettered sign above the cloudy mirror behind the barber's chair. "Palm Reading," it said. I milled around and saw my aunt in a chair poring over her poems. I found my familiar spot beside the bedstead again and listened raptly. He looked up and saw me, smiled, and continued to recite.

When he was finished, he turned in my direction and bowed with a great flourish. I felt my skin begin to redden. I was glad my aunt was oblivious to these goings-on.

On the way home, my aunt wanted to know why I was so quiet. "I'm thinking about my journal," I said. "The Parlor would make a good subject," I persisted. "By the way, what did the professor say about your poems?"

Now it was her turn to redden and squirm a little. "What does he know about poetry, anyway?" she sniffed. "That place is dirty and coarse--no place for womenfolk to be." Subject closed. I knew this was the end of our trips there, but I vowed to myself that I would find a way to go back.

The next Saturday morning when my aunt called on me and wanted me to go with her to the schoolhouse to dust the seats and chalkboard in preparation for the fall opening--she liked to prepare for everything in advance--I feigned illness. She felt of my head and pronounced a summer cold. "Go back to bed, Precious, and get plenty of rest. You want to be well when school starts."

As soon as she was out of the driveway, down the road and out of sight, I jumped on my bike and headed for Pearl's Parlor.

It was noon when I reached the edge of town. I parked my bicycle under a tree and headed for my familiar spot. The professor was finishing his recitation. His voice seemed flat and dull. He looked up, spotted me, and smiled apologetically, the bravura

gone, the eyes lackluster. Something was wrong. I knew it. Then suddenly I remembered my conversation with his children last week. I looked outside where they had been playing. Only the two blond, skinny ones were there now with Taffy. Just then, the crowd let out a gasp, and I looked back to the stage. The professor was sprawled on the dirt floor, his head resting at a strange angle against the bottom of the barber's chair. It was very clear to me, somehow, that he was dying. I burst forward and was at his side. The crowd melted away, and, in my mind, it was as though only the two of us were there. I knelt down and took the massive head in my lap. "I wanted you to read my palm," I heard myself saying to him.

He smiled, and those eyes cleared again one last time. He looked knowingly at me. I heard his voice, full again, gently teasing, the bravura returning. "That's only for the children among us," he said, gesturing expansively with those great hands.

"I love you, you old dinosaur," I said, but he was already gone, expelling a great last breath.

Border People

Carl Dockery

When they aim for you in their automobiles,
or threaten to leave tracks through you,
remember these border people are deranged
by the perpetual possibility of transition.
They have been conditioned by juxtapositions.
In a frenzy of motion they search for boundaries.
There beyond, and just there, they think
lies the brink of the eternal promise.
They never are exactly here, or now;
borders beckon, so they fly;
their greetings have already said goodbye,
so goodbye, goodbye.
They do not so much go as verge upon discovery.
What signals do they await from those places
eyes burning past you from faraway faces?

Aslan: A Puppy's Legacy

Bobbie Pell

Arrived
late;
Departed
early.

Whimpering, simpering,
Breathing
sighs of safety;
Rising, falling,
rising, falling.

Your heart beating
on
My heart beating
one heart beat.

An old soul
meeting
A new soul
loving.

Here
for a moment;
There
for eternity . . .

Drawing by Richard Croom

Full Moon

Julia Nunnally Duncan

"It's the moon that does it every time," B-Linda said to me as we sat on her back porch. She'd called me earlier and asked me to come by and have supper with her; now we had finished the meal and settled down for a chat.

"When I used to clean up rooms at Broughton Hospital," she said, "you let a full moon come and things went haywire. Them that tended to fall out of bed went flying out every time; food was thrown off of trays; those that couldn't sleep normally, slept; them that could sleep stayed up all night. It was a mess."

"Maybe that's why I watched T.V. all last night," I said. "Well, I woke up at three and felt wide awake the rest of the night. Of course, I haven't slept too well since I've moved to the apartment."

B-Linda looked closely at my face. Her hazel eyes were luminous, round, and shiny with interest. Her eyes, olive skin, and dark, thick hair made her look Italian, like Sophia Loren, I thought.

"Yeah, Helen, your eyes look weak today," she said. "You need some cover cream or powder to hide the shadows. How old d'you say you was?"

"Thirty-one," I answered, though she knew this perfectly well.

"Old as the hills like me," she said. "And nothing to show for it--at least in my case."

She was alluding to the fact that neither of us had a family to speak of--she'd never married; I was recently divorced. Her folks were dead; mine lived in east Tennessee where I was raised.

"At least you have a decent job," she said.

B-Linda worked as a beautician's assistant at a beauty salon, washing customers' hair, sweeping up hair clippings, showing and explaining beauty care products. She'd told me outright that she made minimum wage and worked only four days a week. She considered my job as an English tutor at the local community college a great accomplishment, but the fact was my salary was scarcely higher than hers and I had no benefits as a part-time employee. My weekends were spent selling shoes at a store in town. This is where I met her.

"I don't know about that," I said.

"With your college degree you'll end up teaching full-time," she said. "And then you can go to New Orleans."

She had a catalog from a local touring company that described tours and featured color photographs made at the various destinations. One of the tours was titled "Louisiana Leisure Get-Away" and showed a scene from the French Quarter. This page was dog-eared and coffee-stained.

"That's your dream," I said. "But it actually doesn't sound too bad. It's been a while since I've traveled anywhere." Three years, in fact, when Richard and I took our last trip together to Johnson City to see my parents. If you could call it a trip together. Richard spent most of the time watching T.V. in the living room with my father, neither

of them saying much. I think my father sensed something was wrong before I did; probably why they invited us over.

"Maybe we could go together," B-Linda said. "If I could save my tips. . . ." She let these words fade with the waning light. Her frame house was located at the end of a rural road, fields and woods surrounding it. The shadows of evening came early here, even in August.

"I think I'm in the wrong profession," I said.

"A teacher?" she said, her eyes wide again. She laughed her full, high-pitched laugh, and shook her head. She laughed at me like this frequently.

"What's so funny?" I asked.

"You tickle me," she said. "You a teacher in college, around all them smart people all day, and you sitting here saying you're in the wrong profession."

"Don't forget I'm a shoe salesman too."

"Only for now," she said. "You don't know how lucky you are."

"Yeah, till I break my leg and need to go to the hospital. Then we'll see how lucky I am. They probably won't let me in without health insurance."

"They will," she said. "Half the people who come into Broughton didn't have no insurance."

"But that was a state mental hospital, wasn't it?"

"They won't turn you away at any hospital, trust me. When Daddy was sick, then Mama, they didn't have any money that I know of, and the hospital took them in. But who's going to break a leg? You ain't broke a leg in your life."

"One of my students might trip me some time," I said.

"Shit," she said, stretching the word. She rarely used profanity, but when she did it had an impact. "Well," she said, "I'll come and bring you flowers--I can pick them from the garden. Or I'll give you a free hair wash when you get out. I got a key to the salon, and I can get in without the owner knowing."

The sky was dark now except for the moon that cast its pall over the field beyond us. We sat quiet for a while and B-Linda hummed a tune that sounded like a church hymn, though I doubted she knew many of those.

"What's that tune?" I asked.

"Some Irish song. I heard it on a Enya tape Louise plays at the salon. She says Enya soothes the customers, makes them complain less. I like it, but being Irish I guess I would."

"What makes you think you're Irish? You don't look Irish."

"I'm Irish," she said. "That's what my mama told me, and as far as I know she never lied. Except to my daddy that one night when I come in late. But she didn't lie about important things."

"When did you come in late?"

"Well, that was when I was thirteen and had gone out with some older kids--boys and girls, you know. We drove out to the West Cove Baptist Church and stole the church bell. Threw it in the Catawba River. I told Mama, but she swore she'd never tell Daddy, which was a kind of lie, I reckon. She told me to forget about it and pray God would forget it too. She was good like that."

"You miss her, I guess." I missed my parents, but I couldn't go running back to them now. I didn't want them to think I'd made a total mess of my life in North Carolina.

B-Linda didn't often speak about her people, though I'd asked about them, and now she peered at the moon, quiet again.

"I reckon I do," she said finally. "But she nor daddy had much of a life, here in this house. As you can see it ain't a mansion. You should've seen the snakes that used to crawl in on this porch--"

I looked at the rotted boards where my feet rested, and she saw this and laughed.

"Lookee there I see a copperhead 'bout to strike you--" she said and reached and pinched my ankle.

"B-Linda," I said, frowning and shaking my head. "Can't you behave a minute?"

"O.K., teacher," she said. "I'll be a good student." She laughed under her breath in the half light.

"My mama said the moon caused my daddy to be peculiar," she said when she stopped laughing. "You know, the way men get when they smell perfume on a woman's breast--"

I thought about this for a minute. "Sexually?" I asked, a little surprised she would mention this. In the six months I'd known her--and we'd shared a good many meals in this time--she'd not discussed sex. I'd wanted to tell her about Richard's affair, but it didn't seem proper, somehow, to approach the subject. I'd never even discussed it with my mother.

"Well, yeah," she said.

"What do you mean?" I asked. Frankly, it'd been a while since I'd been subjected to sex one way or another, and I wanted to talk about it.

"Well, Mama said as sure as the full moon appeared in the sky, Daddy started pacing, just like a wolf. You know, edgy-like. She said he'd hardly touch his supper, leave meat scraps on the plate--though he loved meat--and push his plate back early. He'd sit there looking at the oil cloth like he was trying to understand the patterns on it. Come to think of it, I remember him doing this, just studying the oil cloth in the lamplight. We had a kerosene lamp on the table--no electricity when I was little."

"I didn't know that," I said, a bit impatient she'd gotten sidetracked.

"Mama said he'd push his plate back and sit there. Then he'd go out to the garden and stand, staring at the sky. When I saw him acting like that, I figured he was worrying about the corn being planted too thick or the worms eating it.

"But it was when he come into their bedroom that it really started, Mama said. She said he'd look at her and walk to the dresser mirror and look at his reflection, and walk to the window and stare out for a while, then come back to the foot of the bed with the most forlorn expression and start calling her name: 'Mary, Mary. . .' like he had the weight of the world on his shoulders or some dark secret he couldn't tell.

"'Mary, Mary,' he'd say, "and she said finally she just blew out the lamp and threw back the covers to allow him in."

"She didn't tell me the details, which I did not want to hear anyway, but she said those were long nights for her. She said I was conceived in the light of a full moon, and I don't doubt it."

"Really?" I said and tried to remember if Richard's lovemaking had been different on moonlit nights. In the early days, his hands were tender, yet eager as they searched my face and breasts, and we made love, fell sleep, and woke to begin again.

But by the time we visited my parents that September, we lay in the iron bed, our backs to each other, and I knew his hands belonged to someone else.

"Yeah," B-Linda said. "It's the moon that makes a person act different."

"Maybe so," I said and realized I longed for someone to stand at my bed and call my name, someone who wanted me so urgently, he was afraid of his desire.

"Was your mama scared at those times, do you think?" I heard my voice in the night and hoped the cloud that passed over the moon would hide the blood in my face. I held my hand on my cheek and felt its heat.

"I never asked her," she said. "It didn't seem none of my business at the time. Can you imagine telling a young girl a story like that?"

"But maybe she needed to talk to somebody about it. Didn't you ever think she wanted to talk to you about it?"

"I reckon," she said, "but there's some things that's best kept to yourself."

"Maybe," I said. I had seen framed pictures of B-Linda's parents propped on the mantle above the stone fireplace in the front room. One of the pictures was an old one of her father, whose dark eyes and dark hair combed slick from his brow reminded me of Valentino. I noticed he had a dimple in his chin, a feature I'd found especially appealing. "Handsome," I'd told B-Linda when I first saw the picture. "He has a dimple like Richard's." She said, "He must've been fresh out of the cradle then; that ain't the way I remember him."

And her mother, in another faded photograph, was plainer than the man, but still attractive with deep-set pale eyes and wavy, brown hair to her shoulders. It was no wonder B-Linda was nice looking.

I thought about these pictures, and we sat silent for a while.

Finally B-Linda said, "Come to think of it, it was a full moon when we stole the bell."

"B-Linda," I said, "sometimes there are things I'd like to talk about, too. You know, it's hard to keep them to yourself."

"And it sunk straight to the bottom of the river," she said, tossing her head and laughing. "And nobody ever saw it again." She laughed and looked at the moonlit field as if she looked into the muddy waters of the Catawba.

Forgotten Seasons

Ren Decatur

A golden monarch busily
Flits from bloom to bloom
Seeking the sustaining nectar
That boils winged blood.

Darting across wildflower
Meadows steeped in summer heat,
Tasting the maiden air,
Taking the urgent dare,
He drives on.

Then an ethereal blossom
Tendrils a soothing embrace
Proffering, promising,
To end his race
To fill that space.

Quietly, knowingly, he
Parts with pasts,
Pushes up pastel paths,
And they nestle
In each other's arms

Until the seasons
All forget themselves.

And I

Roy McGinnis

And I
to write
some fair and foreign prose
in order to survive.
Is survival at the center of my soul?
To trade a buck for gold?
To cash my heart on stories told?
I've tried, dear Lord, I've tried
to stretch the meter
to form the mold
and beat the ounce to stretch across the dome.
But all I ever get from my own forge is fire and fury
and minute glints from dross
enough to fill a thimble
or circle a finger.

Woodcut by Shirley McLaughlin

Joy in November

Will Hooper

It was tangled in November's fires
in leaves and sky--
the sun
sharp and dry like
the smell of steel on your hands

"'n daddy was good at it--
knew just where to make the cut--
I'd hold it by the back feet 'n Ray'd
hold it in front
'n daddy he'd slit the throat
right fast
then he'd slip 'at knife down
on past the throat 'n he'd cut
the aorta--and the blood just spurted--"

it was there in the smell
swirling in smoke of leaves
as green and orange and brown
faded to piles of ashgray
under a sharp cold heat red sunset

"--one time it got me--
squirted me all over! usually we just
let the blood pour on the ground
--the dogs licked it up--
then daddy'd make us go all
the way down the field'n
bury the guts--I told 'm
the dogs'd eat them too--
but hell he never listened
--and there after all 'at work
--us bury'n em' 'n all--
wouldn't you know 'em dogs'd
be down there before the night
was through diggin' 'em up
and eaten 'em--"

the sun is a red delicious

"and then we'd scald the hair
off its skin--now to do that
we'd pour boiling water all over it--
'at got rid of most of it--"

No it is not an apple
it is the air that is cold and sweet

"and then we'd stuff it down through
a long metal shaft--'at scraped off
the rest of it--"

a shiver slid down my back

"then we shoved an iron rod down
its mouth 'n all the way through
so we could connect it up over a fire"

Fall shadows are gold and red

"and it cooked over an open fire
all day 'n night 'n day again"

Our shadows are gold and red

"It was there in the smell
of roasting pig 'n the embers
below--
Boy! that was our joy in November--
we'd slice strips of lean meat off
its side 'n its butt--
mama'd collect the fat from under
the skin 'n put it in jars
'n grease her pans all winter--"

  all winter shadows are
diamond speckle white and taste
  like snow cream--
fall shadows are gold and red

And leaves and sky
And embers
And fire said--

  I am November

Photo by Shirley McLaughlin

The Chainsaw

Robert Morgan

Somebody had been sawing down billboards out on I-26 past town. For the third time in a month it was reported by state troopers that a big sign had been toppled on the same stretch of Interstate. Of course the highway patrol was doing all they could with the investigation. They'll take charge of anything they can and try to get their pictures in all the papers. And because the vandalism had been committed along the Interstate, and because they were the first to report it, they announced they were launching an extensive investigation.

My boss, Sheriff Ward, didn't pay much attention to the billboard destruction at first. He sent me out to look at the damage in the weeds and brush above the highway and I wrote up a routine report. "This is just some teenage hoodlums tired of knocking over mailboxes," he said.

But after the third billboard was cut the advertising company that owned the signs, and the companies that rented their space, complained to the Chamber of Commerce, and the president of the Chamber of Commerce complained to the county commissioners. The county was in the middle of a campaign to attract business to the area, and an editorial in The Times-News pointed out it could not help to have business property destroyed in plain sight of the tens of thousands of cars that passed on I-26 every day.

That's when Sheriff Ward called all us deputies into his office. He was fat and bald, and he was red-faced, just the kind of sheriff you see in the movies. He loved to have his picture in the paper, and he hated more than anything to be criticized in print, especially with an election coming up in the fall.

"Boys, I don't have to tell you how little I like this situation," he said. "Some crazy kids are sawing down signboards and the paper is blaming us." The sheriff wiped his finger across his nose as he always did when he was busy thinking. "The state troopers claim to be studying the case; and the town police would like to get their dirty fingers on it, but the signs are outside the city limits. It's in our county and it looks like we've got it on our hands."

I had been a deputy for four years and I don't think I'd ever seen the sheriff so riled about a case. I think it was the suggestion in the paper that we were impeding the development of the county by not catching the sign cutters that got to him. Ward knew that to be reelected this year he would need the support of the paper and some business money, as well as the country people who had been his traditional constituency. Things were changing in the county.

"Now the thing about teenagers is you can't predict them," he said. "Since they're not doing it for money or anything else that makes sense, who knows where they will strike again, or when. Whoever it is may never saw down another sign. Or they might cut one tonight on the Kanuga Road."

The sheriff was right about that. We had never been able to catch the teenagers that took crowbars and smashed mailboxes at night or stole hubcaps and sold them in South Carolina. They did their work in no predictable time or fashion.

"If we don't catch them in the act of cutting the signs I don't see how we can catch them," Sheriff Ward said. "Anybody that can get their hands on a chainsaw could be doing it." Ward stopped in front of the new computer that was hooked up to the state police network. "I don't think this thing can help us," he said. "And I sure as hell don't want the highway patrol messing around in my jurisdiction." He stopped in front of me and knocked his finger on my chest.

"Jenkins, you go out there and look at this new sign. See if you can find any tracks or clues about the saw they may have used. The rest of you use your contacts among the high school kids and junior deputies to see what you turn up. The kids will know who's doing this."

"What if it ain't kids?" Deputy Clark said.

"It's young punks with nothing better to do," Sheriff Ward said.

I had taken a course in forensics over at the technical college in Asheville, so the sheriff usually sent me out to collect tracks or prints or other evidence. The truth was I didn't get many chances to use what I had learned. You don't need much forensic skill to haul in drunks that have busted up a tavern or serve eviction notices and warrants for court appearances, which is mostly the kind of work we did.

I drove out to I-26 just east of town. I could see why they had not cut down any signs along Four Seasons Boulevard: there were too many lights and too many filling stations and all-night fast food places along there. The signs they had cut were all out of the city limits and beyond the street lights.

I parked on the shoulder of the Interstate and climbed up the steep bank through weeds and blackberry briars. They hadn't mowed the bank that high and briars picked at my twill pants. Grasshoppers fluttered away and crickets clicked in the brush. There is something sad about late summer. I used to feel that as a boy on the farm. All the weeds and grass are turning yellow and dying like they are giving up. I climbed over the chainlink fence and saw the downed sign. It looked like a drive-in movie screen toppled over and warped on the brush and saplings. It was an ad for the Buick company and the picture of a Riviera looked wrenched around.

The sign had been held on creosoted telephone poles. But whoever sawed the poles must have been blind, for the cuts were uneven, at different heights and in different places, like whoever did it was drunk or working in the dark without a light. The weeds had been tromped down all around and there were so many tracks you couldn't make anything out of them. State troopers and news people and spectators had been there. It was too late to get any tracks.

I was bent over looking at one of the stumps when I heard steps behind me. I turned and saw a woman reporter holding a microphone and a man with a camcorder pointed at me.

"I'm Jessica Finch from WTTB News," she said. "Do you have any clues to this mystery of the felled billboards?" She thrust the mike to my mouth.

"We're completing our investigation now, and I'm sure we'll apprehend whoever is doing this," I said. I was proud of how professional I sounded.

"Do you have any idea who might be doing this?" she said.

"As soon as we have completed our investigation there will be an announcement," I said.

When she was gone I looked at the stumps and poles again. In the August sun the wood looked like it had been clawed and chewed and hacked at with the saw. Whoever had done it either couldn't see or had never used a chainsaw before. It might have been some kids that stole their daddy's saw. That was a place to start: find out if any chainsaws had been reported stolen.

By the time I got back in the car my shirt was wet with sweat. The air conditioning felt good as I headed back toward town. As I drove I kept thinking about the ugly awkward cut marks on the poles.

The thing about a chainsaw is you have to nurse it and pamper it. A chainsaw is like a baby in a lot of ways. You mix up its gas and oil like a formula, and you watch to see it doesn't get too hot, doesn't get pinched in a log, and doesn't get dry of oil. A thousand things can go wrong. Sometimes a saw won't start, and you have to jerk and jerk and jerk the cord. Sometimes it stalls out coughing and smoking. A chainsaw will burn out just when you need it most. Or it will jump back off a log and split your head open. If you hit a wire or nail the chain will send out a shower of sparks and maybe break off and slam you right in the face. When I used to cut pulp wood with my daddy and Uncle Zack the thing I feared most was hitting a knot and having the chain bounce right into my eyes.

If I went back to the office the sheriff would just ask me what I found. And I would have to admit I hadn't come up with much. Later he would find I had gotten myself on television, and that would really make him mad. I turned onto the Asheville Highway to circle around a little and cool off. But I called Shirley, our administrative assistant, on the radio.

"Has anybody reported a chainsaw stolen?" I asked.

"Not that I have heard," she said. "Are you missing one?"

"No, but I bet somebody is," I said.

"I can check on the net with nearby counties," Shirley said.

"Thanks," I said.

Rather than drive back to the office I decided to look again at the other two signs that had been cut. I preferred to take the heat of the August sun to the snarling of Ward. In any case I couldn't come up with less than I already had.

The other two signs looked pretty much like the third. Their stumps might have been hacked by a sledge hammer as much as sawed. They could have been cut by someone so high they didn't know what they were doing. The advertising company had already salvaged most of the first sign, but they had left the stumps in the bank. The second sign lay where it had fallen, an ad for the new Pisgah Forest Estates, with a picture of a waterfall crumpled and twisted where it had fallen. That sign had been braced and the braces had been sawed also. A sign that big would have a lot of pressure on it in a high wind. It could be dangerous to cut one down on a windy night.

Since I didn't have anything better to do I walked around the trampled weeds and brush looking at broken sticks and hundreds of tracks and candy wrappers. All the billboards had to be built outside the fenced right of way of the highway. That meant anybody coming from the highway would have to climb over the fence in the dark

holding the chainsaw or handing it to an accomplice. And to get away they would have to crawl back over the fence.

I swung further out into the brush and saw a haulroad about a hundred and fifty feet away. There were tire tracks in the dirt of the road. The tracks ran out through the woods to the edge of a field. That was the way the vandals had come and gone. They hadn't been on the highway at all. No wonder nobody on the Interstate had seen them. The state troopers would never have a chance at them.

I checked out the other two sites again, and sure enough there was a haulroad within a hundred yards of each of the cut signs. I knew I had found out something, though I wasn't sure exactly what. At the very least it meant the chainsawers were familiar with the countryside, with the backroads and dirt roads. By the time I got back to the office Ward had left for the day.

That night I was going to a social in the basement of the Methodist church. It was the first time I had attended any kind of church in more than ten years. Most of my socializing was done in bars, or at the VFW. I'd had some good times, and I'd had the shaft too. Mostly things hadn't worked out with me and girls. After my last girlfriend Cindy had left me I hadn't known what to do. I was not as young as I used to be, and the interesting girls were looking for accountants and computer programmers, somebody with a future. As least that's the way it seemed. They were looking for boys with clothes from The Gap.

Even if I picked up a girl for the night she wouldn't let me take her out again. She found out I lived in a trailer out on Highway 64 behind my brother Charlie's house, and that I was a deputy sheriff, and she lost interest. She wouldn't answer her phone and she always had something else to do.

I was drinking so much that summer I didn't blame girls for avoiding me. Hell, I would like to have avoided myself. I was feeling sorry for myself, and I could get ugly. I had a chip on my shoulder, and it wasn't any computer chip. It was a chunk of wood the size of a chopping block. One night I went to the Salty Dog, and then I went to the Forty-Niner. The last thing I remember was trying to break in on a couple dancing at The Checkmate.

Next thing I knew I was waking up with my face in a puddle in the parking lot across the road from The Checkmate. I didn't know how I had got over there, but suddenly there was a cruiser parked in front of me and O'Brien, a town policeman, was standing over me. He hauled me into city hall and called Sheriff Ward. I had a shiner and a cut lip.

When Ward came to get me he waited until we got in his car before he said anything. "You're even dumber than I thought," he said. I patted my bleeding lip.

"Jenkins, if you've got to get drunk do it in your trailer or go to the next county. Or look for another job."

I knew better than to say anything. When the sheriff was riled you had to let him talk himself out. "This happens again you're history," he said. "History!"

After I got back to the trailer I lay there all night without sleeping. I kept thinking of my face in that dirty water smelling of motor oil and vomit and the taste of blood in my throat. I thought of how many times my mother, before she died, had asked me to go to church, and how my brother Charlie had asked me to go to church. My eye felt

like it was full of muddy water where it was swollen shut. I saw I had to change if I wanted to live much longer.

"People in trouble have to reinvent themselves," a woman on the radio had said the week before. I listened to the radio a lot while I was cruising around the county. I liked the talk shows in particular. As I lay there in the trailer with my face hurting I knew the time had come to reinvent myself.

But it wouldn't be enough to just go to a revival meeting and come forward and get saved. Oh no. I had seen too many people do that and get baptized and join the church, and then after a few weeks or months go back to their old lives. Hell, I'd even done it myself a couple of times when I was younger and just felt foolish afterward. This time it had to be something different, something that would last.

My brother Charlie had married a Methodist, and my sister-in-law Jennie had told me several times I should join their church's Young Adult Fellowship. It was a good place to meet other young people, she said.

"I'm not hardly young anymore," I said.

"You're not hardly adult either," Charlie said. That's the way Charlie always goes at me. He figures being the older brother gives him the right, and the fact that I keep my trailer in his backyard.

"There are some nice people that go to the Fellowship meetings," Jennie said. "And they have projects that are useful."

The next meeting of the Fellowship was on Friday night at eight and that's where I was going. I showered and put on fresh jeans and a new cowboy shirt. I even put on aftershave. The meeting was in the basement of the Methodist church on Vance Street.

Jennie was right about all the people being friendly. They smiled at me, and they didn't ask me to stand up and introduce myself or anything, the way I was afraid they would. They sat around for a while and discussed their new project, which was to clean up the roadsides around the county. On Saturdays they went out in teams to pick up trash from the shoulders and ditches. Come to think of it, I had seen them gathering trash into orange plastic bags which they left on the shoulders to be picked up. And they talked about planting flowers and shrubs around intersections and overpasses on the Interstate,

"Somebody is helping by cutting down billboards," a pretty woman with brown hair said.

"That's too radical for us," the assistant minister said.

"And illegal," I said. But I was sorry I had said it. I didn't want them to think of me as a law enforcement officer.

"Along with air pollution and water pollution and noise pollution, we have sight pollution along the highways," the woman with brown hair said. She wore a loose old-timey dress and no make up. Her skin was smooth as a baby's.

They agreed to go out along the Kanuga Road the next day and pick up bottles and cans and paper. The project to plant poppies around overpasses and intersections would be taken up at the next meeting. The assistant minister would apply to the church for funds to buy seeds and bulbs and more equipment.

After the discussion the assistant minister stood up and led in prayer. But it wasn't a long prayer like they have at revival meetings. It was a short sweet prayer of

thanks. When he said amen the rest of them said amen, and I said it too. Then he shook hands with me. "I'm Jerry Johnson," he said. "Welcome to the Fellowship."

"Larry Jenkins," I said. "My brother Charlie is a member here."

They came up one after the other to shake hands and say they were happy I stopped by. The last was Karen, the brown haired woman. She looked directly into my eyes and smiled. Her hand was soft but strong.

"What do you do, Larry?" she said.

"I'm a deputy," I said, "in the sheriff's department."

A wave passed through her face, like she saw she was talking to the enemy. She looked to the side, and then back at me. "Is that so?" she said.

"It's a job," I said, "Just a job."

"Really?" she said, like she was hearing me for the first time. "You mean you carry a gun and club and everything?"

"I even carry handcuffs," I said.

She acted more surprised than she really was. Then she nodded and put her hand on my elbow to guide me to the refreshment table. There was juice and celery and carrot sticks, and cookies that tasted like nuts and granola.

"Are you coming with us tomorrow?" she said. "I guess I could," I said. I had been thinking of driving over to Dollywood that Saturday to see the country music show. Dolly Parton herself was supposed to be there that weekend.

"You could help us out," Karen said. "Do you drive a pickup?" "I have a Dodge Ram," I said.

"If you brought your truck you could haul the sacks of trash," she said. "We could take them right to the dump."

"If it would help," I said. Her eyes were the same shade of brown as her hair.

"Wonderful," she said, and clapped her hands together. "Listen everybody," she said, "Larry is going to bring his truck tomorrow and help us." There was a cheer all around.

So there I was the next day, out along the Kanuga Road picking up trash. I hoped nobody from the department, and nobody from The Salty Dog, would pass and see me. I remembered how silly those people had looked to me before, stooped over and gathering garbage into their orange sacks. I worked alongside Karen and the others, picking up beer cans and McDonald's styrofoam, kotex and kleenex, paper bags with rotten apples, condoms and torn copies of Playboy. Karen picked up condoms and put them in the bag without saying a word.

Later she rode with me in the Ram to dump the sacks. "I hope they haven't closed the landfill," she said. I noticed it was past three o'clock.

Karen sat on the seat with the belt fastened and her legs spread wide under the old fashioned dress. Her legs were tanned a little, but she was the only woman in the group that had not worn shorts. "Maybe we'll see the bears," she said.

Lately there had been reports of bears feeding at the county dump. People had seen them in the early morning. The bears must have come all the way from the Smokies. The mast had been killed by a late frost that year, and the bears had come down into the valleys looking for groceries, the newspaper said. The department had

had several calls about bears, but every time we answered a complaint the bear had already gone.

We arrived at the entrance to the landfill, but sure enough there was a chain across the road. The sign said the dump was closed on Saturdays after three. "Now what do we do?" I said.

"Park here and carry the sacks in," Karen said.

"You don't want to carry them that far," I said.

"Why not, there can't be more than ten or twelve bags?"

I locked the truck and we each took a bag in either hand. Karen was stronger than she looked, for those bags were heavy. The road up the hill was dusty as flour. The ruts had washed out and there were rocks and gravel in the tracks. Crickets sang in the dry weeds. Karen was wearing sandals and her feet slipped several times on the gravel. Each time she dropped a bag, but only laughed and picked it up again. Her figure under the dress was slim and strong.

At the dump the bulldozer sat to one side of the turning area. Even though it was silent the machine looked ready to charge at us, as if it was guarding the site. Birds pecked at garbage and I saw several rats rippling away.

"Let's put these over there," I said, nodding toward the closest uncovered trash. We threw the bags over the bank among refrigerators and the stew of magazines and bottles. There was a perfume coming off the heaps, a rich musky and fruity stink.

"That's a whiff of the future," Karen said. "Someday the whole planet will be covered by garbage if we keep going this way."

We made two more trips from the truck. It was a quarter of a mile up the hill and Karen was sweating and flushed by the time we threw the last bags over the bank. But I was even more out of breath than she was. "I must be out of shape," I said, and leaned over, resting my hands on my knees.

Karen turned and looked at me and screamed. I spun around to see what had scared her and found myself facing a fat black bear. I don't know where it came from. It must have been hiding in the woods or behind the bulldozer.

Now what do you say to a bear? I had killed deer, and even a wild boar one time in the mountains near Robbinsville. But I had never seen a bear outside the park in the Smokies. This one was so close I could smell it.

"Oh my God," Karen said.

I put out my hands on either side as though to protect her. Now the bear's eyes looked funny. I don't know any way to describe them except to say the bear's eyes looked drunk. I'd heard bears can't see much beyond a few yards anyway. Maybe the bear had been eating fermented garbage or the mash from a bootlegger's still.

"We better run," Karen said.

I thought, maybe this bear just wants to get past us to the garbage. It's hungry and we're blocking its way. I stepped to the left, still holding out my hands, but the bear moved that way too. I stepped quick to the right, and the bear did also.

"Oh no," Karen said. She moved right behind me, so there were the three of us all stepping in the same direction. I shifted to the right again, and the bear followed me. I'd heard of bears that stood on their hind legs and tried to wrestle people. Maybe this bear wanted to fight that way.

"Run!" I said to Karen and jumped further to the left. But she must have made up her mind to dash that way at the same instant for we slammed into each other and my head rang like it had a clapper inside it. I fell right on top of her and she groaned and cried out. As I rolled clear I expected to be facing the bear, but I only saw its rump as it bounded toward the landfill. Its moves had mirrored mine the way people meeting in a hall sometimes do a dance before they can get past each other. "Lord help us," Karen said as she brushed herself off. I knew it was funny, but we were too shook up to laugh until we got back to the truck. And then we had a good giggle at the spectacle we had made of ourselves.

I thought Karen was interested in me because I was different from the other people she knew. She would never have met me if I hadn't shown up at the Young Adult Fellowship. She had been to college, and she worked as a teacher for handicapped kids. She had an office at the community college where she counseled other teachers who did special teaching. And she traveled all over the county to study children who had special needs.

I had never met anybody else who did so many things. She taught classes in vegetarian cooking on the local cable channel. She belonged to an exercise club and she went running two mornings a week before prayer breakfast at the church.

"I don't see how you do it," I said to her that first Saturday.

"I don't eat meat," she said.

"Then you don't like hunters?" I said.

"I don't mind hunters," she said, "as long as they don't eat what they kill."

I think I was already in love with her. Her clear face and bright skin reminded me of something I had forgotten. Her slim hips and strong shoulders took me way back to when I was first interested in girls. She was so natural and perfect.

"You can be a lot of help," she said in the truck.

"To who?" I said.

"To all of us at the Fellowship," she said.

"I want to help," I said.

She looked at me to see if I was mocking her, and blew a strand of hair away from her mouth. "What are you working on now?" she said. "I mean as a deputy."

"Nothing big," I said. "I'm supposed to catch these kids that are cutting down billboards."

"Do you really want to catch them?" she said. "After all, they are helping to clean up the roadside and countryside."

"They're vandals, according to the law," I said.

"Or maybe heroes," she said.

Before she got out at her apartment I asked when I could see her again.

"Next Friday, at the Fellowship," she said.

"I mean before that," I said.

"On Monday night I go to the fitness club. On Tuesday I attend the Friends of the Earth meeting. On Wednesday the Antivivisection Society meets, and on Thursday there is a hearing concerned with pollution in the French Broad Valley."

"How can you do all that?" I said.

"How can I not?" she said.

So I agreed to attend the Friends of the Earth meeting with her on Tuesday.

On Monday Sheriff Ward was in worse humor than he had been the week before. Another billboard had been sawed down on the Interstate, this time north of town toward Fletcher. He sent me out to look at the destruction, and this time I found exactly what I had at the other sites. There were trampled weeds and brush and sneaker tracks, and the poles looked as if they had been gnawed off by a tiger. And sure enough, there was a haulroad about a hundred yards beyond the fallen sign.

This time a picture of the toppled billboard appeared in the paper and Ward got a call from the chairman of the county commissioners. He summoned us all into his office like delinquent children. When he was mad the sheriff walked up and down in front of us like a football coach chewing out his team.

"We're going to catch those little bastards if we have to camp out behind every sign on the Interstate," Ward said. "I'm going to increase the night patrols. There will be one of you on the highway at every hour every night until we make an arrest. Is that clear?"

Ward gave me the shift from twelve to two each morning. I was supposed to cruise the highway continuously then, looking for parked cars or flashlights in the brush.

"What if these ain't kids?" Deputy Clark said.

"What do you mean?" Sheriff Ward said.

"What if these are outside agitators, you know, Sheriff, like the eco-radicals you hear about on television? Environmental extremists dedicated to overthrowing business?"

"We'll catch them," the sheriff said. "But these are not outside radicals. These are teenage punks. Ain't that right, Jenkins?"

"That's right," I said. I was going to suggest we might patrol the backroads near the Interstate, but I knew Ward would just tell me to shut up and do what I was told.

That night I stayed up till midnight and got out on I-26 and drove up and down from the exit at Tryon in the south to the exit at Fletcher in the north. I looked at each sign and I checked out each parked car. But I didn't find a thing but teenagers making out.

On Tuesday I drove Karen to the Friends of the Earth meeting. And afterward she invited me back to her apartment. She had talked so much about health food it surprised me when she offered a beer. From all her church work and interest in herbs and vitamins and fitness, I wouldn't have thought she would drink anything. But there she was offering me this fancy kind of beer from Boston.

"Beer is a natural food," she said. "It's part of our heritage."

"Well I'll be damned," I said.

"Temperance doesn't mean abstinence," she said.

"I'm glad to hear it," I said.

There were other surprises about Karen. You had the feeling she was tanned under the loose old-fashioned dress, that she was tanned all over. Where skin showed through a sleeve or around the neck it was always tanned. It had something to do also

with the sense of freedom and control in the way she moved, as if she was used to being without her clothes. I couldn't explain it.

"Have you caught the billboard cutters?" she said. Her face glowed as she sipped the beer.

"Not yet," I said, "but we will."

"How do you plan to do it?" she said.

"However we can," I said.

"I know," she said. "You can't reveal police secrets."

Later I walked down the hall to the bathroom. There were pictures all along the wall and one of them was a big picture of a naked woman. At first I thought it was a painting. But then I looked closer in the dim light and saw it was a photograph. The woman was lying on a rock and her hair was spread out in a kind of fan. She was half turned away but you could see one breast with a hard nipple and her smooth tanned thigh. I looked at the face again and saw it was Karen. That gave me a funny feeling. I couldn't think of anything else while I was in the bathroom.

Karen was jolly when I returned to the kitchen. "You look like you saw a ghost," she said.

"I was studying your picture," I said.

"Oh that." she said. "That was when I was in college. I had a friend who was a photographer."

I poured myself another beer and sat down.

"It was a woman, if you must know," Karen said. But that seemed like the strangest thing of all, that a woman had taken the picture of her naked on the rock.

"You have been a big help." Karen said. "I'm so glad you helped on the road project." A smile quivered around the corners of her mouth. She looked at me over the top of her glass. "I have another project in mind," she said. "But this one is just for you and me."

"What is it?" I said.

"I can't tell you until the weekend," she said. Karen looked like a little girl all flushed and bursting with a secret. She put her elbows on the table and looked me in the eyes.

When I left that night I promised to see her on Saturday and to help with the road project.

All that week as I patrolled along the Interstate I thought only about Karen and the things she had said. At the office I sat in front of the computer but couldn't concentrate.

"What are you daydreaming about?" Ward said.

"Who is he daydreaming about?" Shirley said.

Shirley's computer check of stolen chainsaws had turned up only three cases, and they were in outlying counties. It was possible some teenager had gone over to Buncombe or Transylvania county to steal a chainsaw. But that was unlikely. Punks were usually too lazy to go further than the local school or filling station to commit vandalism.

"Now if we could just find out who has bought a chainsaw in the last month," I said, "we might get somewhere."

"We can," Shirley said. "I mean I think we can." Shirley had taken several computer courses at Blue Ridge Tech and she was proud of her ability to use E-mail and access bulletin boards and services on the Net.

"How?" I said.

"Two ways. We call all the stores in the county and ask for names of those who have bought chainsaws in the past six weeks. Of course some people just walk in and plunk down cash and the store never knows their names. And local people could go down to the malls in Greenville or over to Asheville."

"What is the second way?" I said.

"We E-mail the major chainsaw companies and ask for names of those who have registered warranties on new chainsaws from this area in the past month."

"Will the companies cooperate?" Ward said.

"We can try," Shirley said.

I went over to Ryan's for the lunch bar and by the time I got back Shirley had put a list on my desk. Eight purchasers from the county had registered warranties on chainsaws in the past month. I went down the list of names and addresses, but there was nobody I recognized. I went over it again and saw the next to last entry was the local chapter of Friends of the Earth. I felt my cheeks get cold and sweat break out on the back of my neck. I remembered all the times Karen had talked approvingly of cuttings down the billboards. It was farfetched to believe that she or other members of the Friends were doing the destruction, and yet there was their name on the computer readout. It was hard to imagine what use such a group could have for a chainsaw. They were more into planting trees and protecting wetlands from development than in cutting down anything.

I studied the names again before driving out to Hooper's Creek to serve a subpoena. Then I drove to a trailer park on Willow to witness the damage a tenant had done to a rental mobile home. The tenant hadn't left a forwarding address.

As soon as I thought she would be home I called Karen on the carphone. "How's business?" she said.

"Business is bad," I said.

"What's wrong?" she said.

"Why would Friends of the Earth buy a chainsaw?" I said.

There was a pause at the other end. "What is this about?" she said. "Is this sheriff's business?"

"Yes, it's sheriff's business," I said. I was sweating even in the air conditioning.

"I don't know, Larry," she said.

"Can't you tell me?" I said.

"We have a project to clean up dead trees and scrub from a lot out near Fruitland," Karen said. "The chapter bought the chainsaw also to clear away brush from trails and access roads. I haven't had time to help them, but I know that's what they are doing. My time recently has been taken up with other things, as you may have noticed."

"Well that explains that," I said.

"You don't think we sawed down your precious billboards?" she said and laughed.

"No no, it's just that I had to check."

"Check on what?"

"On all recent chainsaw purchases," I said.

Before I hung up she invited me to come by the next day after work. "I have a bottle of Australian chardonnay in the fridge," she said. "And a new pasta I want you to try."

"I'll be there," I said.

As soon as I hung up Sheriff Ward came on the radio. "I want you to take two shifts on I-26 tonight," he said.

"When?" I said.

"Ten to two," he said. "Marlette's wife is having a baby down in Tryon and we wouldn't want him out on the highway even if he was willing."

"Yes sir," I said.

"And another thing, Jenkins," the sheriff said. "Stay off the carphone except for sheriff's business."

Ward had been listening in on my call to Karen. I slammed the mike back into its holder and headed out to the Asheville highway for some coffee and shrimp.

That night I started my patrol at the north end of the county. But instead of driving up and down the Interstate as we had been doing I decided to cruise the county roads closest to I-26 on either side. It was risky, because I knew the sheriff wouldn't approve. And since the backroads wound all over the place you might miss somebody even while they were out there sawing down another billboard. But our usual method had turned up nothing, and I didn't see there was anything to lose. The vandals were coming in from behind the highway and if I could find the haulroad they were using I might actually apprehend them. The thing was to look for anything suspicious on the backroads and check it out.

The dirt roads were dusty in late summer and I raised a funnel of dust behind me. I could smell the dust coming through the air conditioning. Next day the cruiser would be covered with dust and I'd have to wash it before Sheriff Ward saw it. But at least you could tell if somebody had passed in the last few minutes because it took a while for the dust to settle.

I bumped over potholes and broken macadam and eased through several little hollows I hadn't seen in years. When I got down to Saluda I crossed the highway on an overpass and worked my way back up the eastern side. Here and there I found cars and pickups parked in haulroads and fields, but it was just teenagers out to enjoy themselves. I turned my spotlight toward them to be sure, and then left them alone.

It was near midnight when I got past Druid Hills north of town where there was a bunch of billboards on the eastern side. I turned onto a little paved road with woods on both sides. I decided to stop and turn off my lights and engine. Just looking had gotten me nowhere. Maybe listening would help. I lowered the window.

At first there was nothing but the drone of traffic on the Interstate. And then I heard a door slam. I waited. There was a buzz like an angry hornet. It could only be a chainsaw. The sound stopped, then started again with several pops that became a roar. I couldn't see any light in the direction of the noise.

I got out of the car and took a flashlight from the back seat. I had a bulletproof vest in the trunk, but decided not to bother with it. I tried to remember if I had seen a

haulroad or entrance to a field before I turned the lights off. Heat from the macadam rose in the dark. There were crickets in the weeds along the ditches, but they got quiet as I walked by, then started up again. I walked about a hundred yards and stopped. The buzz went silent and I listened to the crickets.

There had to be a haulroad leading toward the Interstate for I hadn't seen any car or truck stopped on the county road. I strained to see in the starlight, but it was impossible to find an opening in the woods. The hornet buzz started again. I switched on the flashlight and swept the beam down the road. There was a haulroad about fifty feet ahead. I clicked the light off and headed toward the track into the woods.

Walking carefully, hoping not to break a stick or step on a copperhead, I felt my way along the track toward the sound of the saw. I almost ran into a pickup before I caught the gleam of starlight off its windshield. The roar of the saw was just to my right, toward the highway.

And then I saw the flashlight. It moved like a fish in an aquarium going this way and that, holding steady for a moment then moving again. I crouched down and eased my way forward.

"Hold it steady, damn it," somebody said.

I could see the posts and braces in the cone of light. And way above I saw the billboard like a huge sail against the sky. The floodlight shot above it from the other side. I edged over and saw it was an ad for the Chevrolet company in Fletcher with a picture of a new Lumina.

The saw started roaring and smoke boiled up in front of the flashlight. Whoever was doing the sawing didn't know how to keep the chain from pinching. There was a screech as if the chain had hit a bolt or nail. I saw a slim figure with long hair holding the saw and someone almost as slight holding the flashlight. I took my .38 out of its holster and held it in my right hand as I eased forward.

"Hurry," someone said.

"Freeze," I shouted as I switched on the flashlight in my left hand. "Don't run or I will shoot," I said.

The figure holding the saw turned toward me and long hair fell across the face. I was afraid it was going to be Karen, but as I stepped closer I saw it was just a punk in a Grateful Dead T-shirt. Long greasy hair hung in his eyes. "What the hell?" he said.

"Let's go boys," I said. "I know where there's a special room reserved just for you."

As soon as I got them to town I would call Karen and tell her the case was solved.

Watercolor by Constance Smutz

Somewhere a Melting

Ren Decatur

Somewhere in the darkness--outside
My window
Cricket friction noisily telegraphs
Waves of evening passion

Recalling interrupted
Breathing on a sleepless eve
Somewhere in the darkness -- inside
My window.

Not long ago, nor far,
In a forest glade
By fern-carpeted falls,
Love crept out of dewy
Shadows to heat warm surfaces,

To melt somewhere
Inside out
Glaciers of doubt.

Obituary

Nancy Dillingham

I watched you
die today

There was no noise
and nothing slightly personal

They just
wheeled you
out

looking rather doubtful
about
resurrection

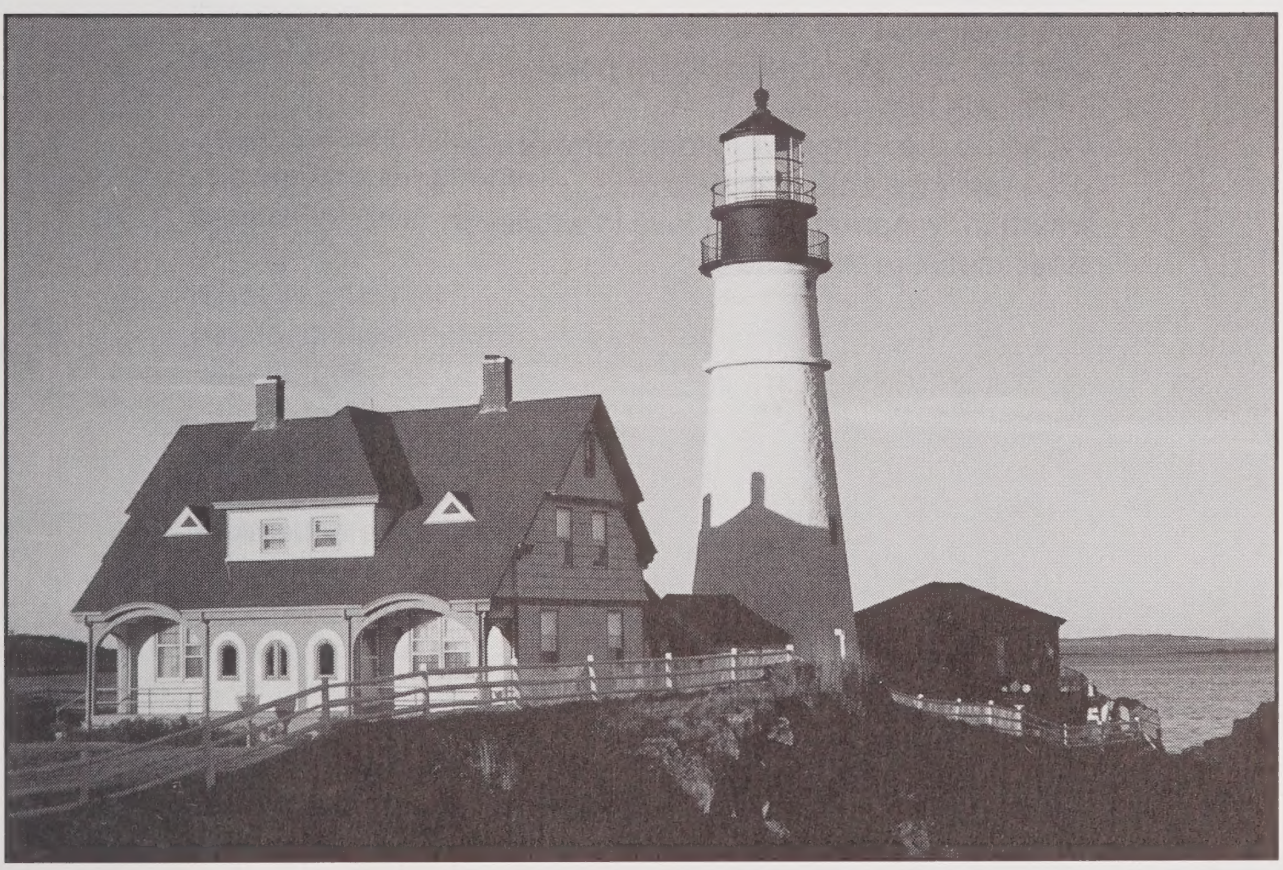


Photo by Olin Wood

Only Picture

Roy McGinnis

The photo, his face and soul
are all gray
All I've known
of the grandfather that is one quarter me.
A poor sawmill worker
who fathered late
left with seven children
left by a wife who could not live like that anymore.
Chasing possums through the floorboards
with a shotgun.
Living on sweet potatoes
and birthing children
were too much I guess.
The photo is empty of her.
Still he smiles
in a time when few others did
and they, the seven heirs to his poverty,
smile with him.
When he died three went to the orphanage
(Poor siblings offer little help)
where they learned to find love in whatever
small measure they could.

Prelude to an Argument

Nancy Dillingham

Taste a tart retort
a crisp reply
a spicy tirade
a salty slogan
a wry riposte

Try a dash of devilry
a dollop of droll
a handful of innuendo

Pop a proverb
like a pickle
or an olive
Sop up gossip like gravy

Eat an earthy expletive
raw as escargot

Savor the mellow flavor
of a well-turned phrase
braised in irony

a heavy invective
baked, glazed in hate
calorie-laden

a healthy heaping
helping of sarcasm
steeped in sweetness
stewed in its own juices
succulent and seductive
melting like butter
in your mouth

Suck a meaty, pungent pun
stuffed with double entendre--
well-done!

Wrap a backhanded compliment
smooth and cool
bland as ice cream
around your tongue

Drool over deft funnies
crunchy and light
dipped in mischief
French-fried in malice
dusted with spite

And when you're through
sip a cup of cordiality
and try as you might
to cleanse your palate

Of Robert Lowell on Miltown
(A prepositional poem)

Sandi Goodridge

In his confessional like a priest
In dark mahogany-lined cubicle,
Under-challenged and
Over-inspired
Under-worked and
Over-paid.

Under the influence of a powerful drug
With no thoughts
Of health, or family ties
Around him he gathered poetry
With gut-spilling images
Of raw unencumbered men and women.

About this time in his life old Robert
----------drowned----------
On Miltown but came
Up screaming, spitting
Up good verses and bad
With one thing
In common--the taint
Of drug-induced perception
At last free to be
About his father's business.

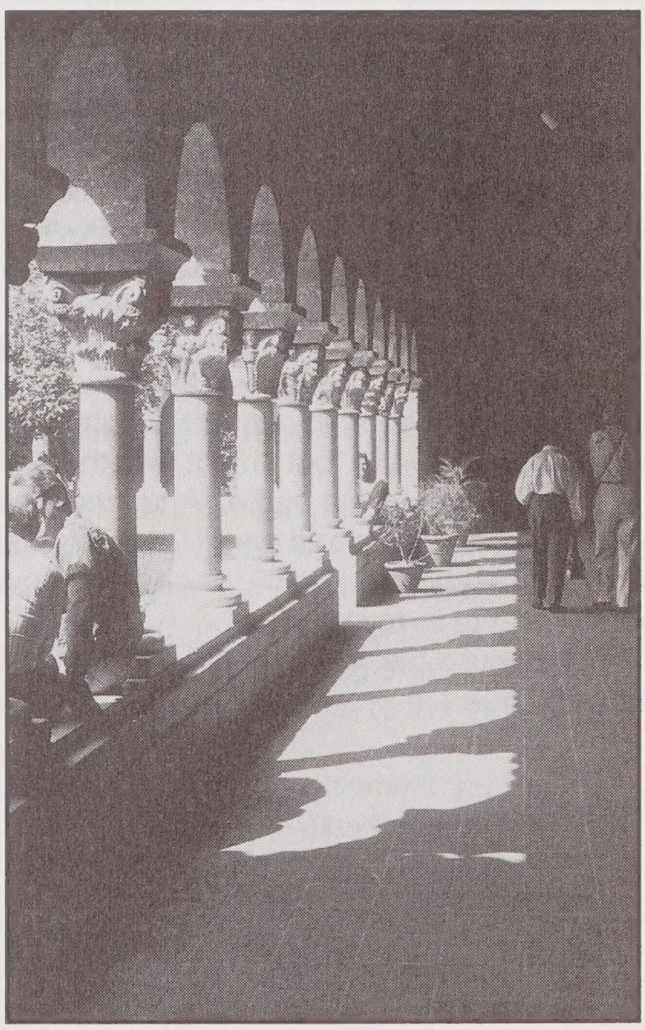


Photo by Peggy Higgins

Encounter

Peggy Higgins

I felt their eyes inching down my back before I actually met, and briefly parried, their brown gazes with a glancing thrust from my own green stare. They were the gauntlet we ran on a steamy June afternoon as we exited the mock Gothic archway of The Cloisters, John D. Rockefeller's Harlem-ringed collection of unicorn tapestries and religious relics, and made our way toward the car with its obvious out-of-state license plates. My Spanish was then almost nonexistent, but their body language alone--shifting eyes and nudging elbows--convinced me I was the conversational topic of the moment. I didn't like the feeling. Me, the exposed, pale outsider under the casual inspection of natives passing judgments with words I couldn't even understand--even if I could hear them.

It had been awhile since I had lived in the city, and I'd lost the knack for invisibility, a talent that, when well-practiced, could repel unwanted looks the way vinyl sheds water. I was drenched by the time we had walked five feet past the lookers, a young woman and two young men, heads bent toward each other as they perched on the granite retaining wall bordering the walkway. Suddenly, I was no longer a well-adjusted adult at home with her place in the world. Instead, I was thrown back in time to my freshman year in high school, long before red hair and freckles were desirable features for young girls, when only blondes had more (or any) fun. In reality, the three people examining me were probably about five years younger than I, but, for that moment, they were the all-knowing seniors rating newcomers by some unfathomable criteria that I spent the next four years trying to decipher.

My husband, a native New Yorker himself, didn't feel the looks, or maybe he just didn't care. But he also didn't mind when I hooked my arm through his. It was a casual move to an observer, but I did it with the deliberation of a medieval knight strapping on his shield just before a battle. And I used him like a shield, putting his impervious hide between their stares and me. I was just beginning to feel invulnerable when the wall sitter nearest us broke off a whispered conversation with the others and spoke directly--not to me, but to my husband.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but my wife says to tell your wife that she has beautiful hair."

Undocumented Tales of the Magnolia Building

Mary Hay Gwynn

During my years of working in the Magnolia Building on the Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College campus, I have heard some stories about the building. More than one hundred years old, the building has housed families, church personnel, and state employees.

Recently the granddaughter of one of the former owners of the house dropped by to visit. As we walked through the rooms, she related some history to me.

As a school girl, she, her brother, and her mother lived in the house with her grandfather. She boarded at Saint Genevieve of the Pines School. Her doting and eccentric grandfather bargained with the nuns at the school. If his granddaughter were allowed to leave the school to eat supper with him, he would leave the house to the Catholic Church when he died. The nuns agreed and each evening the granddaughter joined her family in the stately dining room of her grandfather's home. When her grandfather died of a heart attack while in a bathtub in the house, the property was given to the Catholic Diocese.

Death plays frequently in the house's history. This same woman told me that there are bones in the basement of the house. She knows about the bones because she and her brother saw them when they played in the basement. Perhaps the bones are from the graveyard upon which the house is built.

We do not know the cause of the fall that led to the death of the mother-in-law of one of the residents. She fell down stairs in the back of the house and broke her neck.

If the ghosts from the mother-in-law, the eccentric grandfather, the graveyard, or any of the previous inhabitants roam the premises, they mean no harm to us who currently use the house. From time to time, however, we witness evidence of their presence.

One episode occurred during the Blizzard of 1993. A campus security officer was making his rounds of the campus. At that time no one had been to the Magnolia Building since the snow had fallen. There were no tracks to the house except those of the security car. As the officer climbed from his car and gazed around the grounds, taking in the magnitude of the snow, he saw a curious sight. Circling one of the trees was a set of human-like footprints. There were no footprints leading to the tree, simply the ones circling it.

Like the footprints in the snow, history encircles the house, sometimes mysteriously. Perhaps we in the college community will become players in this history as the house embarks upon its second century.

Photo by Constance Smutz

The Guest List

Juanita Stock

"How could anyone have 170 close friends?" I asked, staring down at the guest list placed before me. I sat in the kitchen at our black formica table with Ted, my stepfather, the fingers of my left hand wedged like plastic bookmarks between the pages of my *Bride's*. Spring break at the University of Florida had brought me home to Largo to make wedding plans. I, like many eager brides-to-be, had anticipated all the preparations. I had consulted Emily Post, Amy Vanderbilt, and numerous bridal magazines in hopes of doing the "right thing."

"I don't think I appreciate your attitude," my mother responded, turning off the kitchen faucets with a vehemence that made them knock. "Why is it so impossible to think I have a lot of friends? Just because you don't, doesn't mean I don't." She swooped to get the powdered cleanser under the sink. The electric dishwasher kicked into the wash cycle. Ted shifted his bulk in his chair. "We've lived here twelve years," she continued. "Unless a person's a social hermit like you, they're bound to make a lot of friends." I winced. If we got on the subject of my social skills, I'd never win. "There's Ted's business associates. Our country club friends. The gals I play golf with." Having doused the stainless steel sink with cleanser, she ground away.

I looked at Ted. He fingered the Rhode Island Red salt shaker on the table, his jaw resting in his left palm, his blue eyes evading mine. I wondered what he was thinking. I knew he couldn't be too happy at the prospect of paying for my wedding. Although he had built his sign painting company into a business that allowed him to vacation just about anytime he wanted and to play golf three days a week, he didn't part with his money easily--particularly where I was concerned. From a previous marriage he had three daughters, for whom he never once missed his monthly child support payment. My father was a different story. He fell behind so often in his twenty dollars a month that my mother frequently had him thrown in jail. No one expected him to be at the wedding, much less to pay for it.

Bob and I wanted a modest church wedding, nothing elaborate. My circle of friends was small, Bob's nine hundred miles away. Considering Ted's probable resentment and his frugal instincts, I thought a small wedding more appropriate. One way to limit a wedding's size, according to Post and Vanderbilt, was to confine the invitations to family and close friends. My mother had directed Ted and me into the kitchen to discuss the point.

I looked at the list. I knew only about a fourth of the people on it. "Who are the Michael Bumgardeners?" I asked.

"Don't you remember them? He has the plumbing business down from Ted's shop. Ted did all his signs. We've been to their place a couple of times. Three years ago they had a great New Year's Eve party. Weren't you there?"

"Uh . . . I don't remember. Well . . . uh . . . who are the Olersons?"

"That's my osteopath and his wife."

"Oh. Emily Sonnenberg?"

"She does all the flower arrangements for the country club."

I hoped my mother was getting the point. She turned to run water in the sink.

"Larry Wallenback?"

"He's the pro at the club."

"Mom, aren't these people more like . . . acquaintances . . . than close . . . ."

"I don't have acquaintances."

"Well, how can you say these people are your close friends?"

"Are you questioning who my friends are?" She confronted me with one fist on her hip, the other hand resting on the sink top. I looked out the jalousie window at the setting sun, resting my gaze on the purple and coral clouds sailing in the sky. Ted sat, elbows on the table, rubbing the palms of his hands back and forth against his temples.

"No-o-o--I just . . . well, there's a lot of people here I don't know. Like the Packetts and the . . . ."

"Pa--ketts," she corrected.

"And Bob Waddell--why would you ask him?" Waddell was the real estate agent she had recently started working with part-time.

"Look. I'm not going to argue with you. That's who I'm going to invite and that's it."

"All these people? I don't know most of them. Neither does Bob . . ."

"So, what does that matter? You mean you don't want my friends at your wedding."

"No, that's not it."

"That's what it sounds like to me. Just because you don't know these people doesn't mean I can't invite them."

"I just thought . . . maybe we could . . . you know . . . have a smaller wedding with close friends. I'm sure Ted doesn't want to spend a fortune on this wedding and one way we could . . ."

"I think I'm a better judge of what Ted can afford than you are. I'm married to him." Ted leaned back in his chair and ran his hand up and down his chest and stomach. "You better get one thing straight. I don't have friends and then drop them. You might, but I don't." She punctuated her point by turning her attention to the black enamel cupboards.

I felt defeated. I couldn't win. I realized my social shortcomings only too well. I might have known she would start attacking them. "I was only hoping we could have a smaller wedding."

She plunged the dishrag under the hot water again, wrung every drop of excess water from it, and swatted back a lock of hair with her wrist. "And just who were you planning on inviting?"

"Well, Faye and Judy . . . Cynthia and Margaret . . . ."

"That's all? You never did have many friends. As I always told you, 'You've got to be a friend to have a friend.'"

"Well, I've been away at school. I've lost touch with people. But couldn't we cut out some of these people?"

"Who? Who would we trim? Look at the list. Who can I leave out?"

"You should know that better than I. This is such a special time in our lives. I want to share it with people I know and not a lot of strangers . . . ."

"They're not strangers to me. Why should you feel uncomfortable simply because you don't know them? My friends are the type who would want to share in the joy of seeing my only daughter get married."

I felt guilty now, but torn.

"As far as money goes, if you're really concerned abut expenses, we can have the ceremony at the country club and then we won't have to pay for the church."

"No, Bob wouldn't . . . ."

"Hell, there you go again. Insisting on what you or Bob want. I'm paying for this. I should have some say. I don't see what's wrong with having the wedding at the Bellaire Country Club. There's lots of room. Particularly if you don't want a large wedding. We'd be right there for the reception. What church were you thinking of having it in?"

"Peace Memorial in Clearwater."

"That big church! If you want a small wedding, why have it there? We could have a nice ceremony at the country club."

"Bob would really object." I could picture his reaction if I told him we were going to get married on a golf course.

"Why?"

"Well, because he thinks we should get married in a church. He has strong feelings about it."

"What difference does it make where you get married? The ceremony shouldn't matter."

"He just wouldn't like it at all. And that's another thing. I forgot to tell you. He doesn't want the punch spiked."

"Well, isn't that just fine. Bob gets to tell me what he wants, but I have to pay for it. What else does he want?"

"Nothing. He just feels real strong about those two things."

A long pause ensued while my mother slammed a few cabinet doors.

"That's just fine. But he isn't the only one involved in this. *I'm* paying for the wedding . . . and reception . . . and I should have some say as to what goes on."

"Maybe Jenny has a point," said Ted. Maybe we could cut the guest list to fewer people."

"Oh . . . so you're in on this too. My only child gets married and I can't give her the kind of wedding I want without everyone objecting. Excuse me for living."

"You don't have to be like that, Ruth. The kids just want a small wedding."

"Yeah. And how am I going to face the people I don't invite? Tell me that. I'd be ashamed. I wouldn't be able to show my face. What a fine wedding this is going to be."

"I'm sorry, Mother. I didn't mean to upset you."

"God! You don't think of anybody but yourself and what you want. Am I to blame for wanting to give you a nice wedding?"

"I really appreciate it, Mom. . . ."

"It just could be smaller," interjected Ted.

"How? I don't see how. Do you realize how embarrassing it will be to have to try to tell people why I couldn't invite them to your wedding? I don't know what I'd say. 'Sorry, you're not a good enough friend to come to my daughter's wedding.' Do you

realize what you're asking me to do? Christ! Why do you always have to have your way? My daughter is getting married and she doesn't want anybody to know. You've gotten me so upset I feel like going in that bedroom and taking that gun in there and shooting myself."

"Mother. Please. Don't talk like that."

"I mean it. That's what I feel like doing." She threw the washrag into the sink. She stormed off to the bedroom, slamming the door so it shook the house.

"Oh, God!"

I looked at Ted. He sat there. "That's just the way she gets," he said. I went to my mother's bedroom door. "Mom, please . . . I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. Please forgive me. I just don't know what to do. I want to make you happy, but Bob has his ideas too. Can't we work something out?"

She opened the bedroom door. "Okay," she said. "We can work something out. Here's the way it's going to be. And I don't want any argument. You can get married in Peace Memorial Church. You can have your small wedding. We'll have just family. No one else. No friends. Nobody. Only family. And I don't want to hear any complaints later. It's settled." She brushed past me to go to the living room. "That's it. I've made up my mind, and that's the way it's going to be."

"You mean we're not going to invite anybody but family? I can't have any friends?"

"Nope, I can't invite mine. You can't invite yours. My mind's made up."

I went to the kitchen and picked up *Bride's*. I put it in the magazine rack. I knew all I needed to know about planning this wedding.

Weavings

S. Suzann Moffitt

"C-R-E-A-K. . ."
Moans the old, wooden rocker
My grandmother sways to and fro
As she sits and talks--

Talks of many things--
Things of the future, present, and
The Past.
I sit enthralled--
Becoming a strand in the tapestry
She weaves.

I see my mother as a young girl,
Coal-black hair in pigtails, rosy cheeks,
  sparkling blue eyes,
Running, laughing, playing. . .
A glimmer of the woman I now know.

I see the pasture full of flowers--
Daisies, Queen Anne's lace, dandelions,
Not the dusty, rocky road on which cars now speed.

I hear the low rumble of the creek
And the chirps of the crickets and katydids,
The music of nature--not of horns and engines.

I feel the cool, tickling, green grass
As it soothes my bare feet,
Now hot and blistered
From the shiny asphalt.

I slowly step out of the tapestry,
Picking off stray threads as I sit,
Still entranced, in front of the rocker.

The antique clock strikes--
Bringing me out of my reverie,
And I must leave.

My grandmother stops her rocking
As we exchange kisses,
Hers on a smooth, round cheek,
Mine on a wrinkled, weathered one.

And as I step down off the porch,
I wonder if the "creak" I hear
Is her rocker
Or the floor underneath.

Pen and ink by Constance Smutz

Skydiving

Nancy Dillingham

Free-falling
through life
is too easy

I'd rather float
with a discerning eye
earning my eternity

than to arrive
surprised
in paradise

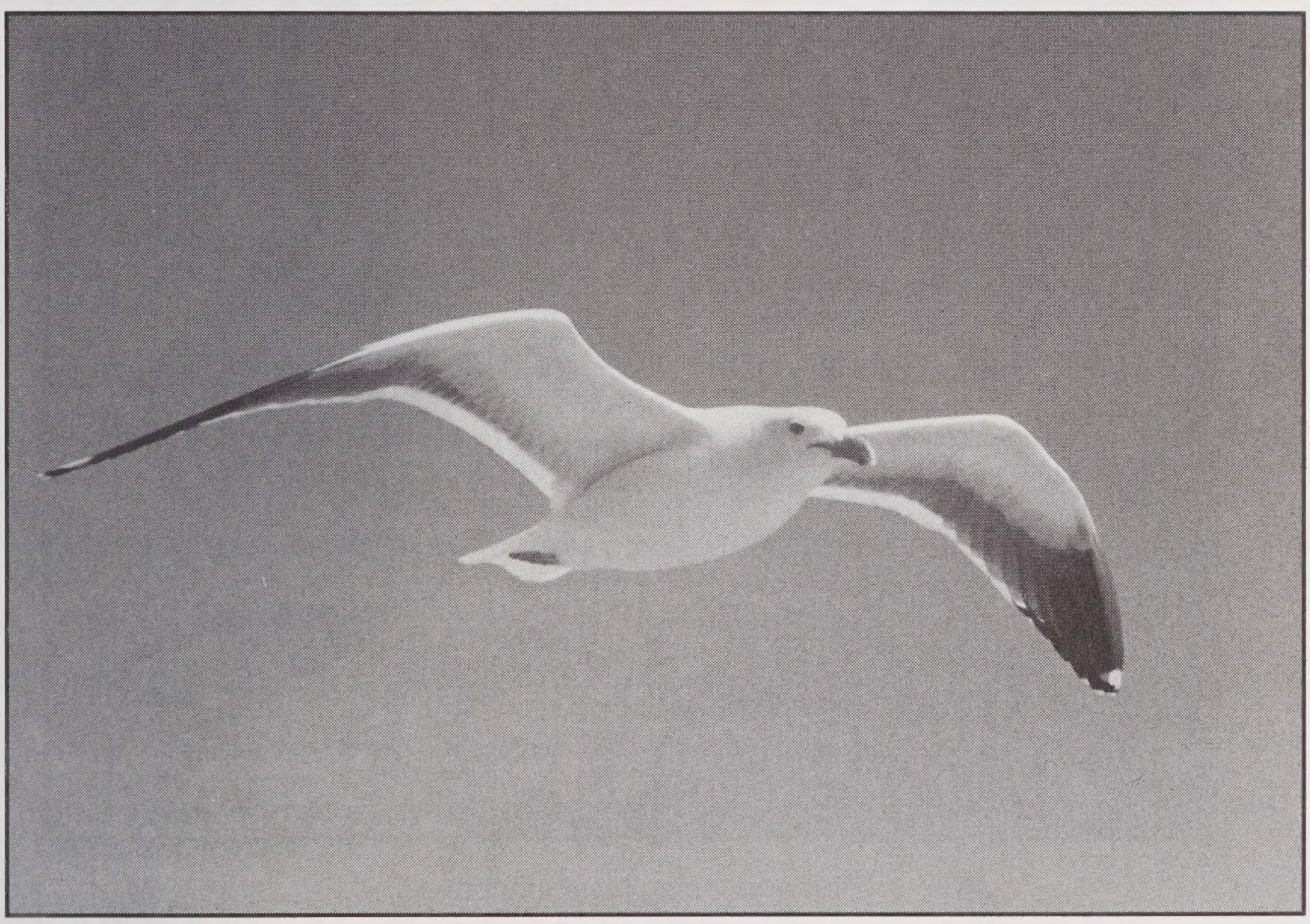


Photo by Olin Wood

Pen and ink by Lisa Johnson

CONTRIBUTORS

Richard Croom has returned from Madison Campus to act as Interim Chairman of Civil Engineering Technology.

Ren Decatur teaches English in the English and Foreign Languages Department.

Nancy Dillingham is an instructor in Adult Basic Education.

Carl Dockery heads the English Department at Tri-County Community College.

Julia Nunnally Duncan teaches in the English Department at McDowell Technical Community College.

Sandi Goodridge teaches in the English and Foreign Languages Department.

Heather Gordon teaches art in Continuing Education.

Mary Hay Gwynn is Director, Human Resources Development.

Deborah L. Harmon is Special Needs Coordinator/Counselor in Student Services.

Peggy Higgins teaches in Compensatory Education.

Will Hooper teaches physics in the Division of Arts and Sciences.

Janice Howell teaches in Compensatory Education.

Lisa Johnson teaches in the English and Foreign Languages Department.

Roy McGinnis teaches in the Guided Studies Department.

Shirley McLaughlin is director of the Learning Resources Center.

Celia Miles teaches in the English and Foreign Languages Department.

S. Suzann Moffitt is Guided Studies Coordinator at Tri-County Community College.

Robert Morgan is a poet and English Professor at Cornell University. His most recent novel, *The Truest Pleasure*, is published by Algonquin Books.

Bobbie Pell teaches in the English and Foreign Languages Department.

Pat Riviere is a writer at Mayland Community College.

Constance M. Smutz is on leave from Compensatory Education.

Juanita Stock teaches English at Haywood Community College.

Sheila Tillman, ABTCC's and NCCCS's TEACHER OF THE YEAR--1995, chairs the Hospitality Education Department.

Olin Wood is Vice President, Instructional Services.

With this issue, *Victoria Press* broadens its scope to include contributions from neighboring community colleges and from established writers with local ties. We thank each contributor and especially poet and novelist Robert Morgan.